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JULIET.

“The lyfe so short, the craft so long to learn,
The assay so hard, so *sharp* the conquering.”

CHAUCER.

“I ask thee for a faithful love,
Through constant watching, wise.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

| | |
|---------------------|-----------|
| ALDERDALE | PAGE I |
|---------------------|-----------|

CHAPTER II.

| | |
|-----------------|----|
| MOLLY | 15 |
|-----------------|----|

CHAPTER III.

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| AMONG THE WILD ROSES | 30 |
|--------------------------------|----|

CHAPTER IV.

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| TEA AT ALDERDALE | 43 |
|----------------------------|----|

CHAPTER V.

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| BRUNSKILL'S MOVE | 66 |
|----------------------------|----|

CHAPTER VI.

| | |
|------------------------|----|
| ON THE VERGE | 86 |
|------------------------|----|

For. Res. Ray. 28 July 53
D. L. Ray. 28 July 53
McLaughlin 2 Dec. 53

CHAPTER VII.

| | PAGE |
|--------------------------|------|
| OVER THE VERGE | 100 |

CHAPTER VIII.

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| WITH ISABEL | 123 |
|-----------------------|-----|

CHAPTER IX.

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| SELF-CONFEST | 135 |
|------------------------|-----|

CHAPTER X.

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| ADVANCE | 158 |
|-------------------|-----|

CHAPTER XI.

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| MISGIVINGS | 173 |
|----------------------|-----|

CHAPTER XII.

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| BY THE WHERN | 186 |
|------------------------|-----|

CHAPTER XIII.

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| A BLACK NIGHT | 232 |
|-------------------------|-----|

CHAPTER XIV.

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| PAST VERSUS PRESENT | 263 |
|-------------------------------|-----|



JULIET.

CHAPTER I.

ALDERDALE.

“AND you were very sorry when the Laybournes went away?”

“I was more sorry than any words can express. You know I am a lonely man, Molly, and Laybourne and his wife were friends to me, and their children like my brothers and sisters. There was always something in which to be interested among them all. When they were gone, and Mr. and Miss Gliddon had taken their place, it was not like the same house. For a long time I

could scarcely endure to go near it. I missed them all, Ted and Juliet, Carrie and Sophie, Sam and Phil, even the little twins. It became more of a vicarage certainly, but, to my fancy, less of a home."

"And how long was it before you made friends with the Gliddons?"

"Not long. Mr. Gliddon was delicate, and cared more for study than parish work; so I began to help him, as I had helped Laybourne, when my own work-hours were over."

"I never heard how it really happened, but I know Mr. Gliddon did something very unselfish. Every one always shakes his head in naming him, and says, 'Ay, but Passon's a gey gude mon.' What did he do, Mr. Brunskill?"

As Molly Murdock spoke, she laughed the low laugh which always made Brunskill smile, so happy was it. Then she took up her hood from the grass, where she had

thrown it on sitting down, and tying its strings atop of it, stuck within them a bunch of pink-frilled daisies. Smoothing back her wind-roughened brown hair with one hand; she, with the other, put on this white hood; tilting it well over her brow, and getting an effect of jauntiness, crisp freshness, and pure coolness which Brunskill was far from being the only one to think bewitching. No other dales-girl in Wherndale had this knack, but no other dales-girl wore white hoods in summer and red ones in winter, for hay-making, walking, and church-service, and whatever was going on. Her cotemporaries patronized gaudy hats for best, and lilac-printed hoods for common, and disdained her better taste and sense with a disdain largely jealous of their easy simplicity, for which Gilbert Brunskill was devoutly thankful each time he saw her in the street of Moorhead or the fields round Alderdale, for, far or near, there was no fear

of mistaking the white hood and its wearer. Involuntarily, he now leant forward to look within the circle of its shadow, and their eyes met, hers shining forth with limpid softness to rest gravely on his ; her lips half-apart in a smile which he treasured in his memory. That smile, those guileless eyes, made his heart leap, and sent the blood rushing to his cheeks. But her heart did not leap, nor did she blush. She did not realize the ardour of his gaze, and he knew it. " Would to Heaven she would look down when I look at her ! " he thought. He had already watched long for her to look down.

They had been walking in the meadows at Alderdale, meadows lately cleared of grass, and lying in emerald patches on the hill-sides and near the beck. The August heat had tired them, and at last Molly sat down on the step of a stile overhung with rowans, Brunskill taking the topmost rail a little above her. The beck ran almost at their feet, the

sparkle of its eddies belying the drowsiness of its murmur, its opposite banks rising steeply from pasture to bent, from bent to ling, whose purple *blow* lay in a sultry haze against the sky. Two fields away, just where the valley was narrowest, the old Grange stood, sunk amid the abundant foliage of sycamores, oaks, alders, and wild cherries, above which its blue smoke lazily curled. Here a bridge spanned the beck, its ivy-hung arch reflected in one of the deep brown sun-flecked pools which made the Whern dear to trout-fishers ; and in front of the house, sheltered, warm, and fragrant, lay Molly's garden, gay now with purple iris, tiger-lilies, and double stocks, its borders edged with tortoise-stones from the river, its paths finialed with bushes of box and southernwood. The front-door and the lattices of the windows in their heavy mullions were all set wide open for sun and scented air to steal in. Above the stocks hummed honey-laden bees.

A dog drowsed on the hot door-step. Old Tamar Verity, Mat Murdock's housekeeper, plodded in and out in her clogs. Once she went down to the water-side, and standing under a barberry tree that was already tasselled with red-gold flower, shaded her eyes with her hand, and looked across the fields to the stile where Mr. Brunskill and Molly sat. As she looked, she smiled, and then returned to her work with much nodding of her head. Evidently, what she had seen pleased her. She walked up the path again with an air of deep thought, and on the step paused a moment, counting three on her fingers and speaking aloud.

“It's three whole years this hay-making since the lass gave up her schooling, and that the master's been coming here, courting her. Does she ken, or doesn't she ken, what brings him? She's allers the same with every one. I'd fain give the master a lift to speak before Noll comes

home. She thinks a deal of Noll. Lasses *are* so daft."

Meanwhile, Brunskill was happily enlightening Molly's ignorance.

"Mr. Gliddon and Laybourne were friends at Caius," he said. "Gliddon took a Fellowship and lived a scholar's life, with the promise of the excellent living his father held. Laybourne was a poor tutor, *minus* friends or prospects, and married a governess. They had eight children, as you know, all handsome, clever, and high-spirited. But it became impossible for Laybourne to maintain them on one hundred and fifty pounds a year. Sickness came, and Mrs. Laybourne and Ted became delicate. One day, when the pinch was at its hardest, Laybourne wrote to Gliddon, simply explaining his position. That letter created a revolution in Mr. Gliddon's mind—it must have verged on despair. He followed the only course that occurred to him. For the first time he compared their

positions. That day he sent him a cheque for one hundred pounds, as a loan which he never afterwards treated but as a gift, and the same week he obtained the consent of the Caius trustees and the Bishop of Storminster to an exchange of livings with Laybourne on his father's death. The old man only lived a few years, and then, perfectly as a matter of course, Mr. Gliddon gently insisted upon Laybourne going to Marshlands, giving up without perceptible regret his cherished circle of Cambridge friends, and settling contentedly in this out-of-the-world place."

Brunskill's voice had gradually dropped. When it ceased there was silence. Molly held her breath, scarcely daring to move, lest she should shake the tears down her cheeks. They had sprung to her eyes involuntarily, and now glistened with self-confessing brightness; she knew not what to do. But Brunskill knew. He drew out his handkerchief,

and passed it to her, smiling. At that smile, supremely sweet, yet whimsical in its intelligence, she gave a sob, dashing away the handkerchief with one hand and the tears with the other.

“It *makes* me cry,” she said, half in scorn of herself, half in appeal, which she nevertheless knew was not needed.

“I understand,” he said.

“It is wonderful,” she said ; “such things are beautiful. How much goodness there is in the world !”

He smiled, but took care not to disturb this simple faith. To him it seemed that “the rarity of Christian charity” shone from a quagmire of self-interest, but Molly’s *world* was Wherndale, and her simplicity precious as gold to him.

“Mr. Quin, too, is good, but his kindness to Noll costs him no self-denial,” said Molly.

“Yes, he is good. . He will do his best

for Noll, but he is a sort of hobby for him. Having no son of his own, you see, and only one daughter, he has taken him up as a subject for self-gratification. It is very natural, since the lad happens to have his own talent for painting. Juliet Laybourne was very jealous of his good fortune until their own befel."

"I don't wonder, when he was only a carpenter's son and she the vicar's daughter. I wish I had seen Miss Juliet Laybourne."

"Why?" asked Brunskill.

"Noll has some sketches of her, and she looks so strange, not beautiful, but uncommon. He talks of her, too."

"She never allowed him to sketch her so long as they were in bitter poverty. She was a girl who loved and hated with equal intensity. She loved her brother Ted as passionately as she hated Noll for his good prospects. I never saw such a change in any one as in her when she realized what Mr.

Gliddon had done for them. Until then, she had been fascinating through her brilliant cleverness, and perversity, and defiance, which one felt were saturated with sadness; afterwards she sparkled into genuine happiness, and became absolutely charming. But she was, and always will be, an enigmatical woman."

"Her brother Ted is dead, is he not?"

"Yes, and from what her mother writes to Miss Gliddon, Juliet's heart well-nigh died with him. I often wonder what will become of Juliet Laybourne. We were always mutually interested in each other."

"Was she inquisitive about you?" Molly asked.

"That was her woman's prerogative."

"It is one I, too, exercise."

"Do you?" he said, and laughed; but immediately afterwards he sighed, and she felt she had touched a tender point, and was sorry.

"Let us go home," she said ; but she made no move, and he fathomed the suggestion at its true value, as a change of subject.

"It is a pity to curtail pleasant things," he said.

"Oh, yes, I don't *want* to go," she said quickly ; "I'm not nearly tired of our talk, and it is so lovely here. Are you not very fond of Alderdale, Mr. Brunskill ?"

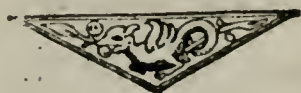
"Very."

"I thought you were, you come so often. So am I ; I love it very dearly. Indeed, who could help loving it, especially a day like this. Even Noll, who has travelled so much, says he never saw a dearer old place for a summer day."

She uttered these last words slowly, and, bending forward, pulled a bunch of burnet growing so near the stile that it had escaped the scythe. Had he seen her face at that moment, he would have perceived a blush

suffuse it, and a glimmer of more than happiness beneath her half-dropped eyelids ; but he neither saw nor thought of looking. To him, Noll Ormrod was her cousin, her old play-fellow and schoolfellow, and affected him with no sense of danger ahead. Relationship precluded more, and the very brilliancy of Noll's prospects would have made the idea preposterous in his opinion. Though a dalesman, Noll was no longer of the dale. Mr. Quin, to whom the Church House at Moorhead belonged, and who was one of the popular artists of the day, had discovered in him the possession of talent similar to his own, and was educating him with the intention of eventual adoption. In a year or two his star would set in Moorhead, to rise in Mr. Quin's brilliant town life of art, fashion, and fame. That Noll should think of falling in love with Molly, or Molly think of Noll as more dear than any one on earth, would naturally, and apart from his personal feeling, have seemed

to Brunskill nothing short of a catastrophe. But it was precisely one of those catastrophes which happens every day in this perplexed and perplexing world.





CHAPTER II.

MOLLY.

MOLLY was a mere child when she came to Alderdale to live with her uncle. The long journey from Hipsley into Wherndale was undertaken the day after her father's funeral, a day in the depths of winter when snow lay on the hills, and there was the quiet of a gathering storm in the air. Mat was confident they could reach home before the storm, but when they came to the moors it was heavy travelling. He was fuddled by his frequent potations at the inns they had passed, and they suddenly found themselves in the midst of a blinding whirl of flakes when ten miles from

any other shelter than that of a wall or shooting-butt. Their safety depended on the instinct of the horse and their being able to discern the gates leading into each lotment. Two of these they passed in safety, after hard work in clearing the snow to admit of their opening ; then they became stunned by the force of the wind and the stinging rush of the storm. For a few minutes the horse struggled bravely, then stood still, and Mat, wrenching out the whip, gave it a savage cut that sent it wildly plunging on some feet, after which it staggered and suddenly dropped, exhausted. As it did so, Molly shot out over its head, but immediately picked herself up without having uttered a sound, and stood staring at Mat as he leisurely descended with the reins still in his hands, and a phlegm which seemed to denote this as the ordinary method of stopping a horse. He returned her stare with a smile that turned her cold by its

mixture of abject fear and taunting astonishment.

“Thee’rt a spirity young witch,” he said. “If we’re to die here, thee’ll die game—gamier nor I, I lay; only just close your eyes first. Thee’rt all eyes with that black hood round thy face, and they’re a deal too like thy father’s for my fancy. Aren’t you feared, lass?”

“Not much,” said Molly. “Must we walk now?”

Mat was walking round the horse, kicking it indiscriminately, as it lay panting with frothy mouth.

“The old mare’ll die,” he said; “I’m going to walk, though where, devil knows. This is his business, truly, and he only kens where it’ll land us. You can please yourself between walking and sitting in the trap. It’ll never snow that up; you’d be warm in the hay in the bottom, and there’s a snack of meat and bread I’d leave

thee. To-morrow I'd come and yoke another horse."

As he spoke he did not look at her, and, child though she was, she distrusted the alternative he most encouraged. She looked speculatively round her. Nothing but snow, and silence but for the panting of the horse. That sound would gradually cease, and she imagined night coming on and dense darkness, and herself alone with the dead brute, which she would never be able to believe was dead and unlikely to begin to struggle. Some presentiment assured her of the danger of staying and falling asleep there. She thought, with a sob, of her father's strong protective arms, but, as they were no longer there, bravely determined to judge and act for herself.

"I'll walk too," she said, lifting up her frock with quiet resolution.

And they started, well apart each from the other.

Happily, the short day was now drawing to sunset, and the snow ceased. As dark fell they reached a wall, from whence they looked down into the valley. The air was full of the roar of the flooded river, and, directly below, a light was twinkling amid the sycamore trees round Alderdale. Towards it they plunged, surmounting the walls by the great drifts reared against them, and scarcely conscious of more than that the twinkling light heralded warmth, shelter, and safety. Just before crossing the calf-garth, Mat amazed Molly by proposing to carry her.

“Not now ; no !” she said.

He looked down at her, feeling that she had comprehended his motive.

“Devil take thee !” he muttered. “Thee’rt more fay nor canny. Any man or woman kens I couldn’t have carried thee through them drifts.”

Then a door opened. She saw a great

wainscoted kitchen, ruddy with leaping flames on the hearth ; a woman took her up, there was a noise in her ears, a dancing mist all round, and she fainted.

Such was Molly Murdock's coming home to Alderdale.

But she had established her character in Mat's opinion. He never liked but always feared her, and, except when drunk, let her alone. As years passed, it became more and more his habit to be drunk, and the struggle between the two opposite tendencies of drink and thrift made life hard at Alderdale. It would have been impossible for Molly to have thriven in such an atmosphere but for Mat's respect for Tamar Verity, who was too thrifty and managing to be dispensed with. He would have married her to save her wage and clip her independence, but that she scoffed at, being anything but a fool. Alderdale was a curious old house ; and one of its antiquities was an oaken bedstead, built into

the wall of the parlour, and enclosed by two panelled oak doors, the interior white-washed, with a sloping ceiling formed by the stairs, and a niche in the wall for a candlestick. Into this Molly was thrust by Tamar when Mat was seen coming down to the bridge tipsy from a market or a fair, and experience had taught them that it was not then safe for her to be within reach of his hands or voice. The legend attached to the bedstead made him shun it. Treasure had been found there; a man murdered his master to gain possession of it, and it was said the master sometimes lay there still, a bloody ghost. But Tamar, who did not believe in the supernatural, used it as a lumber closet; and Molly, who feared nothing so much as a drunkard, would run and clamber in among the moth-eaten hair boxes and a great brass milk-kettle, and one or two musty pillows, condemned from use by being stuffed with pigeons' feathers, and so,

lying *perdu*, with closed doors, would sit nursing her knees, listening to the rats, and sometimes fancying she saw the ghost, while Mat went staggering up and down the house before reeling off to the lang-settle and besotted slumbers.

These were experiences which Tamar could not avoid for Molly, but her straightforward intrepidity secured her counterbalancing advantages in her daily schooling at Moorhead, and the half-holidays spent in *laking* with her cousins. When Molly grew up, Mat gave Tamar notice to leave, saying that Molly could do the work now. This at first struck Tamar dumb. Then she burst into opposition, but finding stubborn indifference opposed to invective, she went to Moorhead to confabulate with his sister, Mrs. Ormrod, who would, she knew, take her side, if only for the sake of not taking Mat's. Mrs. Ormrod was greatly amazed when she heard her errand, not so much at

Mat's plan as at Tamar having failed to carry her point. She returned with her, and quickly subdued him by the simple process of giving him "a bit of her mind." In her opinion, there was no justice in shackling Molly with the work of a farm when her tidy fortune made her independent of more than a roof from any of them; and she was convinced that if Anthony had not gone so suddenly with spasms at the heart, he would have left his child to her care, in the carpenter's bonny cottage at Moorhead, where there were the advantages of sobriety, prosperity, honesty, and a family. Mrs. Ormrod spoke strongly, and spared him neither accusation nor insinuation. She was certain that Mat had destroyed Anthony's will, in order to obtain control of Molly's minority. There had been no will forthcoming after his death, though her husband had witnessed the signature of one whose conditions were not favourable to Mat. She suspected that Molly's money

was feeding risky speculations towards re-establishing at Alderdale a prosperity which no strain at thrift could accomplish, so long as there was a deeper strain on bottles and barrels.

To Noll, Molly's advent had been a god-send. His brothers were unequal to his exactions as a genius, and unimpressed by his good prospects and the importance they engendered. Molly fell at once into the toils, confessed that Jocky was too rough and Billy a *softie*, and never wearied of details relating to himself and his plans. Nor was it unnatural that he should value her artistic worth, and be stimulated to particular effort when she was his model. This she was always ready to be. She would don or doff anything he wished, would assume any attitude he fancied, and never fail in brightness and good humour. When he went to Antwerp, and thence to Paris, just about the time of her leaving school, she missed him more than

words could express, and his holidays were her halcyon days of content unspeakable. He would do and say things which thrilled her at the time, and were cherished in her inmost heart. In his absence there were certain stiles through which she never passed without imagining he was again there, that she felt the touch of his hand, or saw his eyes bent upon her ; certain gates where they had trysted, which she never opened without a thought of what her happiness would be when they trysted there again. At such times the tenderest of lights dawned in her soft eyes, her colour would come and go, she moved with so buoyant a step that she seemed to feel only air around her, and to have wings to her actions as well as to her thoughts. Old Tamar Verity saw all this, and, being a calm spectator, she saw more ; but she said nothing. She believed in things being allowed to take their own course ; a climax must come, and she could not avert it. Sometimes, how-

ever, she could scarcely hold her tongue for impatience at the general *daftiness* of folks. Why did not the master speak, and bring Molly to her senses? Then that *shuffling* Noll would find himself ousted, and Molly would learn what straightforward sweethearting was. She would not confess to any inward qualms as to this being the result of the climax; in her opinion, none but a fool would prefer Noll to Gilbert Brunskill.

Thus matters rested until Noll left Paris. He came home for two months that summer, devoted his time to sketching, and sketched chiefly in the vicinity of Alderdale; the appearance of his white umbrella perched on the hillside acting irresistibly on Molly; and causing her to snatch up her hood and run to join him the moment her work was done.

“Eh, goodness me!” thought Tamar, one day, after having watched this proceeding, and strained in vain to see under the umbrella. “There he is at it again; and there’s the

master a bit higher up th' dale, whipping the beck this bright morning for the sake of dropping in here to tea. And I don't believe the lassie knows why he drops in, and I doubt me if Noll knows rightly what brings himself to Alderdale with his paints and trap-sticks. She'll laugh first because t'one can't get his picture to his liking, and then she'll laugh again because t'other's caught no trout. But it'll none be so long; she'll find out what fish the master wants—a lassie in a pink-sprigged cotton gown; and then it'll be *aye* to him, my certie, all of a hush with her soft eyes down."

Molly, in her pink-sprigged cotton gown, was a bewitching figure. She was fond of touches of bright colour, and of flowers stuck in her brooch or waistband. Her face could not now be said to be *all eyes*, even in depreciation by Mat, but her eyes were still unusually big, and as deep as a sunny tarn. When she laughed there were dimples in her cheeks. At this time she laughed a good

deal, a low, haunting laugh of sincerest pleasure and joy. Her nature was highly sanguine. She could not meet a trouble half way, and accepted her uncle's churlishness as a matter of course. She never obtruded her gayest spirits on him, but reserved them for her many friends, permitting nothing to damp the supreme happiness of being loved and admired for her own sake. She would go to Moorhead, and give a bright word or glance to every one whom she met ; at the Vicarage Miss Gliddon always bestowed upon her a warm kiss ; she would put her arms round Tamar's neck, and never dream of a rebuff ; and she would run out to meet Brunskill or Noll with equal lavishment of a saucy curtsy or flower ready dressed for the button-hole. It seemed to them, when she gave the flowers, that it was a matter of mere mischief, and its acceptance one of pure indifference. But this was not so. She would pluck Brunskill's with a careless snap, but Noll's was lingered

over, and many rejected before she found one to suit her. Their ignorance was, however, balanced by hers, for she did not know that, while Noll's presently withered and fell, Brunskill's was often placed, still fresh, between the leaves of his pocket-book.





CHAPTER III.

AMONG THE WILD ROSES.

BRUNSKILL, whipping the beck that day in the sunshine of an unclouded June sky, was too deep sunk in thought to realize that the rainy promise of the morning in which he started from Moorhead had failed, and to feel himself ridiculous. Hay-time in Wherndale was always holiday-time; the lads were wanted to drive the sledges, the lasses to rake the grass into swathes, or toss it into the sunny dishevelment that cajoled it into hay. The fields were then thronged with bands of sun-burnt workers, laughing and talking from the moment the dew dried until that when the sun

sank behind the hills ; and the school-house at Moorhead was empty and silent, but for the unheeded bees that took their lesson in the perplexity of mundane affairs presented by the inside of a window-pane. Brunskill was glad to leave the school-room behind. He wanted to be in the open air, to be leisurely, yet employed, and to think ; so he strolled across the fields to his favourite point from which to begin his angling, and proceeded to whip the beck unwearyingly up and down. His whole height was visible in the limpid brown pools, and he was a man of noticeable height ; his figure stalwart, well proportioned, and well built, his head planted firmly above a rounded throat, the compact cut of his hair and abundant dark beard adding massiveness to a face whose every feature was at once square and clear cut to a degree that might have been uncompromising, but for the expression of tenderness which redeemed them from possibility of less than attractiveness.

He was only roused from his pre-occupation when his line caught in a dipping branch, or when it became necessary to balance himself for a leap from one rock to another ; never by the suspicion of a bite. However, as he had no particular wish for a bite, he was enjoying himself, and so were the trout, as they basked in sunny crevices and watched him.

His thoughts were wholly of Molly. He had now saved sufficient to authorize him in asking her to be his wife ; the place and manner of that asking occupied him absorbingly, making him alternately dreamy and impatient. He could not understand his impatience. It seemed preposterous that he, who had been patient so long, could not be so a little longer ; yet it was undeniable that he was suddenly feeling an uneasiness, a prompting to haste and precipitation, which was utterly foreign to his experience. Presently these mastered him, and he could no longer endure his torpid occupation. Wind-

ing in his line, he concealed it and his empty basket among the alders, and then started to walk towards the head of the dale for the sake of wholesome exercise. When he returned, it was tea-time, and he went on to the bridge with the intention of crossing it and having his tea at the Grange, in hopes of securing a stroll with Molly afterwards.

He stood a moment on the bridge, looking dreamily into the garden, and scanning the door and windows of the house in expectation of seeing Molly's brown head or white hood in one or the other. But as he stood, there came from below a sudden burst of laughter and voices, and going to the parapet, he looked over. There was Molly, balancing herself a-tiptoe on a stone round which flashed a babbling eddy of water, gathering wild roses from branches which Noll, from the bank above, was guiding to her reach with his mahl-stick. She was looking up at him and laughing, her head hanging back,

her brown hair ruffled low on her forehead, her arms bare to the elbow, and her dress tilted high round her ankles, its pink sprigs vying with the flowers at which she was pulling; the whole sweet, bright picture in full sunlight, and unflecked by any shadow save that of rose-leaves.

Brunskill felt his own purpose suddenly checked, not, however, by any presentiment of evil or twinge of jealousy, but by her light-heartedness. It seemed to him that she must still be heart-whole, since she could be so captivatingly gay. Had she been in love, she must surely have been more thoughtful.

He determined then and there not to go in to tea, and not to come again in hopes of speaking to her until Noll was gone—to wait, in fact, until he could have her to himself, and win her slowly to more seriousness and shyness. He did not try to persuade himself that she would have been both serious and shy had it been he who was helping

her to gather her nosegay, and thus gain encouragement to remain. The question occurred to him, but was at once dismissed with a sigh. Then he turned, and went home.

When Molly had gathered as many roses as she could hold, she began to reward Noll for his trouble by pelting him with leaves. She was in wild spirits. Ormrod did not remember ever having seen her absolutely heedless and perverse, and now she was both ; neither had he before seen her look so pretty ; her dishevelment suited her face to perfection, her attitude set off her figure. As he looked down, catching glimpses of her between the boughs, he once or twice felt a rush of choking emotion to his heart, a longing to have his arms around her waist, and feel her velvety cheek against his. She had piqued him to-day. When he came in the morning he knew he particularly wanted to see her ; he had had news, and cared to

discuss them with no one but her. He had hoisted his umbrella as usual in a conspicuous position, but she only appeared for a moment in the doorway and waved her hand. At dinner-time he ran down to the house, but she was busy tossing the butter, and would not promise to be quick. All the afternoon he had watched for her more than painted; indeed, at last he became so feverishly tantalized that work was impossible, and he had packed it up and thrown himself upon the grass, feeling half inclined to go home in dudgeon, but lacking the resolution to forego the pleasure of seeing her come at last. When she came it was nearly tea-time, and he was so cross that she stared, pouted, and ran down again to the beck. For a moment he hesitated what to do, whether to follow or teach her a lesson by going; but inclination prompted him to stay, and inclination was his ruler. He got up, put his hands in his pockets, and leisurely

strolled down the brant, finding her in difficulties, and looking lovely in her humility. He rushed for his mahl-stick, and during the next few minutes realized that he had more to say than he had had the slightest intention of saying six hours before. The question now was how to reach her and make her listen.

“Molly,” he said, peering between the boughs, “come up, that’s a good girl. There’s something I must tell you.”

“Is it good or bad ? ”

“Good—for me.”

“Then I guess it.”

“That’s ridiculous. You may have a good guess, but it’ll leave you far short of the truth.”

“You can tell me. I’ll listen.”

“I won’t tell you while you’re there. Come up. I want you near me ; I want to see you.”

“You can see me,” said she, provokingly, arranging herself accordingly.

“Molly, what possesses you to-day?” he cried, exasperated beyond measure, and becoming each moment more ardently determined to carry his point. “Don’t you mean to come home for tea? Are you going to spend your evening there?”

“I’m going home this way; there are hippins,” she said, turning.

He knew she would be across in a moment if he were not quick, so, seizing an alder branch, he swung himself down beside her, took her in his arms, and sprang back to the bank. When he released her, and she stood beside him flushed and subdued, he bent and kissed her lips, then took her face between his hands.

“How dare you thwart me?” he said, in a suppressed voice.

She did not answer or move, but she trembled so much that she could scarcely stand, and he, perceiving this, again encircled her, drawing her to him with one hand, while

with the other he caressed her hair, pretending to smooth it, but as yet sufficiently self-possessed to avoid doing so, for he admired it as it was.

“ You knew I would have my own way in the end, Molly, if you provoked me. Did you want me to have my own way ? ”

“ No,” she said, struggling a little. His opinion of women and their ways instantly prompted him to press still closer to her ; a little struggle to be free must mean coyness, and for that the antidote was encouragement. He wished to encourage her, without, however, having any clear impression to what it must lead.

But Molly was recovering herself, and although it was delicious to be so near him, it was not wise, she scarcely even thought right. Since he would not understand a gesture, she must speak. Her firm demand so much surprised him that he yielded at once, and she went first up the bank.

“You have not heard what I had to say,” he said.

“No, but you have only to tell me.”

This calmness piqued him, and he did not speak until they reached the gate on to the bridge. Then, as she put out her hand to open it, he intercepted her, and stood so close to her again that she could not move.

“Molly,” he said, “I am going to Rome for three years.”

There was silence. She neither laughed nor cried, nor looked up. He watched her with cruel intentness, but could not have sworn either that she coloured or turned pale. She was perfectly still, keeping her eyes down, and scarcely, as it seemed to him, breathing. This was totally different to what he had expected.

“Will you miss me, Molly?” he said feeling the more every moment in which she showed no emotion that such was necessary to his happiness.

“We shall all miss you,” she said, apparently without effort.

“But you?”

“Of course; only you have already been away so much. Will you open the gate, please?”

For a moment he inwardly vowed he would not open the gate, or do anything reasonable which might be suggested in this matter-of-fact way. But she had now schooled herself to look at him, and that look was so unconcerned and steady that it staggered even him. His confidence failed, and feeling that she was utterly baffling, he did as she asked. Moreover, Tamar was just then heard calling them in to tea, and as she could see them from the door, he thought it expedient, on every account, to desist from further persistency. He did not want any action of his in such a matter blazoning up and down the Dale; another day he must choose his opportunity better, in hopes of finding her more

reasonable. On the bridge he detained her by some irrelevant remark. He was again perfectly composed. It would have been quite contrary to his principles to have shown her less indifference than she showed him.





CHAPTER IV.

TEA AT ALDERDALE.

BUT it was impossible that this indifference should last. Love on Molly's part, pique on Ormrod's, drew them together each day more closely. Ormrod refrained from going to Alderdale until he was certain that she would be more amenable, and his absence frightened and perplexed her. She watched for him by day, and at night lay awake, going over in her mind every detail of that scene by the river; one moment thrilled and trembling at the remembrance of his close clasp, the next remorseful over her rebuff; again made miserable by the thought that he would soon be gone,

and finding no consolation in the reflection that she had acted rightly. Where was the advantage in having acted rightly? She could not endure the fear that she had completely estranged him. The time was so short now, and she felt that if they did not part as friends, her heart would break. Rome was as the Antipodes to her, three years a lifetime; the words recurred to her like a death-knell; when once he was gone he would be out of reach and her love unavailing, and surely love was not meant to be unavailing. She told herself without any sensation of shame that she loved him; the plea of friendship was a poor plea, and would not satisfy her. She saw nothing to be ashamed of, because it seemed to her simple soul that he had already shown his love; such advances as he had made could only be construed to mean one thing, and she, in her folly and pride, had repulsed them, and pretended that they were of no value to her. The more she

thought, the more she hungered for him, and the more she wept to herself when he still did not come. One day she started for Moorhead, determined to find him and make him see what she was suffering; but when half-way, she paused, feeling suddenly that she could not, must not, go any further. If she had sinned she must bear the consequences, but it was his place to come to her, not hers to go to him, and she was fearful of betraying herself to others, conscious that her face was clouded by anxiety, and pale for want of dreamless rest. Moreover, she knew she had not sinned. Good impulses had moved her to act as she had. Had she thought only of herself, she would have yielded to his caresses, but thoughts of him and of reason and justice had influenced her. It might be that these had now occurred to him too, and that he acknowledged their truth and the necessity for self-control. If so, she must also be self-controlled, and never make it

harder for him by showing him how hard it was for her.

Ormrod, however, had no conscientious scruples. He was a flirt ; had had *affaires du cœur* with matter-of-fact Flemings and piquant Parisians, and held women's hearts in light esteem. He had no intention of marrying for many years, and certainly would never marry Molly Murdock, though she was so pretty, and, as he could not help believing, unfortunately fond of him. But then so many girls were fond of him ; he could not prevent their spontaneous affection, he could only get out of the way when it began too urgently to demand reciprocation. Had he been quite certain that Molly was fond of him, he would not have troubled himself about her ; but she had baffled him, and he pondered it over in his mind, and felt that he must probe her a little more deeply before he could be certain. It might not be prudent to give her a cousinly kiss when he went away, still less to write to

her or ask her to write to him. He forgot that he had already given her a kiss which was more than cousinly, and urged her to a confession which he had wished to be passionate. Neither could he think calmly that Brunskill would win her. If her heart were not given to Brunskill, it would be best that she should fully realize to whom it was given. Eventually, when "love's young dream" had expired, she might marry Brunskill and be tolerably happy ; but it was above all things expedient that a woman should know her own heart, and not risk sin and sorrow by unconscious perjury. It was his creed that women should confess themselves to their husbands, acknowledge their peccadilloes in the past, and swear unswerving fealty for the future. Men, however, were not bound to confess anything, their peccadilloes were mere flea-bites ; the weaker vessel must resist temptation, the stronger might fall and be free from condemnation.

On the following Sunday was to be held the monthly evening service at Alderdale, which took the place of service in church, as more convenient for the people at the dale-head. At these, Brunskill was in the habit of officiating for Mr. Gliddon, who was thus spared a long walk which he disliked, while it was secured to others who enjoyed it. He and Miss Gliddon generally walked there together after afternoon school at Moorhead, arriving in time for tea, and as they walked they talked. To-day Ormrod was all the way some hundred yards ahead of them. He knew they were following, but was not disposed to be bored by uncongenial company; he had good reasons for wishing to avoid Brunskill, and Miss Gliddon was too inquisitive for convenience. The fact, however, of his figure being constantly in sight brought him prominently into their minds, and gave Miss Gliddon an opportunity such as she had long wished for, but failed to find,

for frank speech on a subject very dear to her. Yet she scarcely knew what to say now that the opportunity had arisen.

“I shall be glad when Noll is gone,” she said at last.

“It will be a good thing for him, this study in Rome. Mr. Quin knows better, it seems, than to work by halves,” said Brunskill.

“I shall be glad for the sake of others besides himself. He goes too much to Alderdale. Mischief may be done before it be suspected.”

“*Mischief!*” Brunskill repeated, instantly taking alarm, as she intended that he should. “You don’t mean, you cannot, that he would dare to trifle with Molly?”

“It could be nothing but trifling,” said Miss Gliddon, growing more bold; “I heard yesterday by chance that he has constantly been there, and she with him. I don’t think highly of his principles. He may do for amusement what she might take in serious

earnest, and only trouble could follow. It is out of the question for him to marry her; I expect he will now drift wholly apart from natural ties and associations."

"If he has dared to cause her one unhappy thought, he is a pitiful scoundrel," said Brunskill.

Involuntarily, he quickened his steps, as though to overtake Ormrod. The sight of him swinging along, one hand in his pocket, the other carrying a stick, with which he slashed at the bracken tops, suddenly filled him with irritated rage. He hated to see a man wantonly cut down lovely and vigorous vegetable growth, leaving prone a blade or flower which the moment before had stood upright and rejoicing in the air and sunshine. Even so might the same ruthless hand cut down a human flower. As this thought flashed into his mind, keenly associated with Molly, his flower, his PICCIOLA, he stopped. Miss Gliddon stopped too, looking at him

in alarm, and found his eyes fixed upon her.

“By heaven! I wish I had spoken to her years ago,” he said, in a voice so low that it was scarcely audible.

“I wish you had. Oh, why didn’t you?” said she.

“I wanted something worthy of her; God knows that was it.”

She thought the pain in his voice, the resolution of his confession, which seemed to be wrung from him under a sense of heinous guilt more than of mere regret, terrible. She put her hand on his arm, to bring him to himself, and relieve the tension visible in his pale face and clenched fists.

“Let us walk on and hope for the best,” she said, gently.

The shock had been greater than she expected. He seemed to have had no suspicion, no misgiving, no apprehension, and she, for long, had had all these, but

had not ventured to trench upon his reserve.

When they reached the Moss, a tract of low-lying heather, where the moor-birds bred in shelter, they were surprised to see Ormrod leave the road, and strike into a path across the ling leading to a ridge of rock known as the Screes. It was a relief to both of them. Brunskill, at least, had felt the prospect of sitting down to tea with him at Alderdale intolerable, now that his nerves were unstrung, his senses sharpened to acute and suspicious observation.

Molly met them at the door, looking her own bonny self, but a little pale, Brunskill thought, as he held her hand a second longer than usual. However, when he named this, she smiled, and said it was the heat; then slipped past him and took Miss Gliddon into the garden to see a bed of pansies which she had raised from seed. Brunskill followed them. The pansy-bed was lovely, varying in

shade from white to amber and deepest purple, each flower looking like a baby-face upturned to the dallying caress of sun and breeze. Miss Gliddon stooped to look into their golden eyes, turning the stems gently between two fingers.

“They are my favourite flowers,” said Molly; “and pansy is such a pretty name, but here they call them step-mothers. See,” she added, gathering one, “there are five petals. The single one is the new wife, the two next to it are her own children, and these two, the lowest, her step-children. It fits nicely, but I don’t care to think of it in that way.”

“And there is another name—heart’s-ease,” said Brunskill.

“Oh, I never heard that,” she said, looking up as she knelt. “It, too, is very pretty.”

“It is the lover’s name,” Miss Gliddon said. “Once in the garden of a poet I found pansies growing next to love-lies-bleeding, and behind both, a row of St. Joseph lilies.”

“ The meaning of all that is beyond me,” said Molly, shaking her head, regretfully.

“ Lilies signify purity. Now, do you see how well the three harmonize ? ”

“ But I could never bear to think that love lay bleeding.”

“ Could you not ? ” said Brunskill, looking down at her as he held the little gate open for them to pass through. There was a new tone in his voice, which struck instantly on her ear, and she glanced at him with surprise. But there was also a new look in his face, and her eyes fell again from more than surprise.

Tea was ready when they went in, and Mat got up from the lang-settle, to give them a churlish welcome. He was brushed as to his clothes, and greased as to his hair, into the picture of sleek discomfort ; his coat lay folded on the press ready for *sarvice*, and he hitched his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat with the intention of appearing to command the situation.

“How’s Passon?” he said.

“Quite well,” said Miss Gliddon.

“And how’s yersel’?”

“Still better, if possible.”

“And how do you find yersel’, Master,” said Tamar Verity, bustling in from the dairy with cream and a dish of cheesecakes.

Mat persistently ignored Brunskill when *Passon* or *Passon’s sister* were at hand, and Tamar would not have him ignored. He was a prime favourite of hers, and she meant him to feel welcome at Alderdale, both for his own sake and Molly’s. These monthly services were her red-letter days, far surpassing in interest even sheep-clipping time. The previous day was always devoted to incessant scrubbing and polishing, and when the *house* was complete she “cleaned hersel’.”

She presented a comely aspect as she sat at the head of the table, her cap starched and crimped to unique dimensions, a checked kerchief pinned across her chest; and when

she got up to *dash* to the fire for more water it was seen that she wore clogs and short linsey skirts. She always had a great deal to say to Miss Gliddon, and to-day conversation mainly devolved upon them ; Mat never spoke, Brunskill was unusually quiet, and Molly only threw in an occasional remark for fear of being thought unwell if she gave way to pre-occupation.

Afterwards the kitchen was cleared for service ; the table moved into the window, and some benches brought in from an out-house. Upon these benches the women and children sat, while the men sprang, each time they rose from their knees, on to various carved chests standing against the walls, sitting there with their legs dangling in great ease. The scene was Arcadian for reverent simplicity, like a leaf taken out of the lives of the Pilgrim Fathers. The flagged floor was sanded, the walls and ceiling wainscoted, the latter being crossed by massive beams,

where Mat chalked his accounts, and from which depended lines of dried oaten clap-cakes. Now and again, a glint of sunshine caught a pewter dish on the delf-rack or a brass candlestick on the mantelpiece, the metal-work of one of the villainous old guns slung from a crook in the ceiling or the carved door of a cupboard in the wainscot, a man's rugged face or the soft cheeks of a girl. One lattice of the mullioned window was thrown open, and in the pauses of the prayers, was heard the murmur of the river. The table, against which Brunskill stood, was covered with a fair white cloth and dressed with Tamar's pots of musk and hydrangea. The homeliness of the place suited the homeliness of the people, and Brunskill did his utmost to make the service homely, avoiding repetition, and pouring into it as much simple fervour as possible. The leading of the hymns devolved upon Molly, who had a sweet, clear voice. She stood by

Miss Gliddon at the other end of the table, and Brunskill's eyes rested upon her every time he looked up. He was certain she was not well, for in addition to the paleness there were dark rings round her eyes. Towards the end of the second hymn, however, he noticed more colour steal into her face, and could have sworn that her hands trembled as she closed her book. Suspicion rushed upon him with overwhelming force. He turned and threw a searching glance round, but saw no sign of Ormrod. He did not command the passage leading from the open door, but Molly did, and she had seen Noll steal noiselessly in, under cover of the dusk, and take up an ambushed position against the wall. Moreover, their eyes met; he nodded and smiled, and she quivered into colour and nervousness all at once. She forgot to find the text; did not hear a word of the brief address; and led the last hymn in a wavering voice, that seemed to reach her

own ears across a dream. When Brunskill got up from his knees as the people were dispersing, she had disappeared.

Yes, she had disappeared. Ormrod had signalled, pointed, and vanished. Instinct told her where he was gone, and that he wished her to follow. The moment there was movement among the congregation she slipped out, snatched her hood from its peg in passing, and followed him. She found him in a little gully fed by a stream that loitered down from the Moss, where wild cherry-trees clustered thickly. He emerged from their shelter to help her to spring up the bank from the river, looking, meanwhile, cautiously around him.

“You are sure no one saw you?” he said.

“Certain,” she answered.

She wished to be seen as little as he. Her happiness was inexpressible, and for his eyes alone. She was forgiven, they were again friends. He wanted her all to himself; per-

haps he had reasoned away the inconvenience of chill facts, and finding he could not do without her, resolved to overcome every barrier, and prove himself more than friend ; how much more, she dared not whisper even to herself.

“ Oh, Noll,” she murmured, “ you should not have come into the passage. I could scarcely sing.”

“ What ? ” he exclaimed.

“ Indeed, I could not.”

The *naïveté* of the admission, an admission of whose self-betrayal she was evidently unconscious, delighted his keen sense of the piquant, and filled him with triumph.

“ Molly, you love me ? ” he said.

She did not answer, but neither did she resist in the slightest degree when he drew her to him, and folded her in his arms. She never doubted that her emotion was fully reciprocated ; the thought did not for a moment enter her mind that he was exacting

everything and giving nothing ; that the will was not father to the deed, and intended to lead to the only honourable climax. How was she to realize in that delicious hour that it was her affection to which he had alluded, not his own ?

Brunskill, meanwhile, had looked for her in vain. Then he questioned Miss Gliddon, but she had no clue to her whereabouts ; had not seen Ormrod, and suggested that she might be upstairs. Presently, when the people were gone, he got Tamar to go upstairs and look for her, but of course, uselessly.

“She’ll be setting some of the folk,” said Tamar, loath to confess to uneasiness.

He laughed shortly, looking at her as though he would penetrate her inmost thought, and she resented it.

“I’m neither innard nor deceiving,” she said ; “I ken no more than yersel’ where the lassie is. Wait a bit and she’ll turn up.”

But wait there, in the kitchen, he could

not. Action was necessary. Miss Gliddon was gone with other company home, and there was no need to hurry. He went out.

The evening was lovely. The valley lay bathed in the sunset glow that deepened the folded shadows on the hills. Not a sound broke the stillness save the gurgle of the river under the alders. But nature's peace held no restitution for Brunskill, and he loitered on to the bridge under a sense of sickening disappointment. He had looked forward to a few words with Molly, to a little lingering walk at her side through the meadows, and instead of these, she was not to be found. And his heart was the prey to a fear which gathered in heaviness every moment. When he got to the Moss without having seen any sign of her, he despaired, and laying his arms along the top of the gate, strove to overcome the chill that clutched him. A little further on, the road dipped into a hollow, where some rowans

hung over a rock cropping out from the ling, and in going down it his eye was caught by something white under the rowans. It was not the gleam of water, there was no moon to light on the rock ; involuntarily he stepped on to the grassy margin, took a few more steps, and then stopped suddenly.

That glimmer of white was Molly's hood. He gazed at it, fascinated. Ormrod and she were sitting on the rock. He could hear the murmur of their voices ; he saw her draw her hand from his and touch a flower in his button-hole. He remembered the scene beneath the bridge a few days previously, to which he had attached no importance. Perhaps it had held a deeper meaning than he thought ; perhaps he was then urging her to this, and she was dallying with him, uncertain of herself, thinking perplexedly of another, and that other, himself. Supposing he had not gone home, but had stayed, gone into the house, sat beside her, advanced his

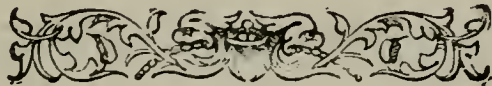
wish to monopolize her, his desire for her affection—what then? He would fain have answered himself to the satisfaction of his craving for her consideration, even though it might have tortured him with regret; but as he looked at them, he could not. It was not Ormrod's air of devotion that impressed him, for he knew he had such airs always at command, but it was the absence of Molly's gay spirits and the abandonment to quiet happiness that had taken their place.

Just then she looked up at Ormrod, and he bent down close to her lips. Brunskill thought he was going to kiss her, and he could not endure the thought. The blood rushed to his face, he clenched his hands, holding his breath; but no kiss was exchanged, and he breathed freely again. He looked round him with a dazed look, feeling as though he had stood there for hours, as though he were in another world; which he was. He had been living in a fool's para-

dise, watching a Picciola grow. He had meant to gather the Picciola, but another had stepped in. Picciola and paradise were gone ; the fool was left.

“ Poor fool ! ” he said, and smiled without a sigh.

A smile comes easiest in self-pity of self-deception.





CHAPTER V.

BRUNSKILL'S MOVE.

THE following day Brunskill went to see Miss Gliddon, having evolved from much thought, a course of action for himself, but not wishing to put it into practice without her advice and co-operation. It had struck him that Ormrod was acting secretly, and would enforce secrecy upon Molly. Now, Brunskill was convinced that there was love-making, and resolved that it should be acknowledged by Ormrod. He must prove himself honourable, or if not honourable, all the world of Wherndale should know it. It was an uncompromising resolution, but

would, he considered, place a greater check upon Ormrod's unscrupulousness than anything else : if he had won Molly he must keep her, or be known as a scoundrel.

When he told Miss Gliddon what he had seen on the Moss, she expressed no surprise. She was not surprised, but was greatly disposed to blame herself for not having foreseen such a catastrophe and tried to avert it by cautioning Ormrod or protecting Molly.

"I might have known there was danger," she said, "and that it would culminate during this final visit. She is so pretty and so trustful, and has always thought so much about him. If only I had got her to come and stay with me, as she might have done so naturally, he would have been more careful, feeling at least that he must be straightforward. But I never thought of it."

"I wish you would get her to come to you now," said Brunskill.

“ I fear it is too late.”

“ In one way, yes ; but don't you see, it would force him to acknowledge an engagement ? ”

“ Do you think she would come ? ”

“ She has often come before. She could not refuse, and she would be unsuspicious of our object ; indeed, she would not imagine for a moment that we were in collusion.”

“ Do you mean her to tell me what has transpired ? ”

“ Yes ; and I mean Ormrod to tell me.”

“ How in the world will you accomplish that ? I fancy he will avoid you more than any of us. He must have seen——” she hesitated, looking away.

“ Yes,” said Brunskill.

“ Well ? ”

“ I shall tell him that I saw them last night, and what was naturally to be inferred. He will detest me, but that is nothing.”

“ I will do my share,” said Miss Gliddon.

It was true that Molly could not refuse her invitation, but she was very reluctant to accept it, and when she first named it to Ormrod, he declared she should not go. There was still a week before he was to leave for London, and that week he had resolved to pass chiefly at Alderdale, not having dreamt for a moment that any third person would step in with a check movement. He realized at once what was involved. It would be impossible to maintain mere cousinly familiarity with Molly under Miss Gliddon's sharp eyes, when Molly herself had every right to expect more, and would be unable to show that she did not. Yet he was far from willing to acknowledge an engagement with her. The situation was already embarrassing. He plunged his hands into his pockets, and emitted a low, moody whistle, looking apprehensively at Molly, who was unconsciously pursuing her knitting at his side. A suggestion lay before him, and

he could not be certain that she would be reasonable and see its justice as clearly as he did.

“This is about the most awkward thing she could have hit upon; confoundedly awkward, I call it,” he said.

“She meant it kindly,” said Molly. “But it is very disappointing. If only she knew about us, I’m sure she would not expect me to go. I have been thinking, must I write and tell her?”

“Tell her what?” said Ormrod.

She looked up in surprise and some reproach, a soft blush creeping into her cheeks.

“About us, you and me,” she said again. “There is nothing else to tell her that I know of; and she is such a good friend of mine. I should like her to know.”

“Know what? My dear Molly, she must know what friends we are; every one who has eyes, must. There is no necessity to tell her more than that, that I kiss you

and squeeze your hand, for instance. She would only say, 'Of course he does.'"

"But it means so much. I can't bear to think it does not."

"You must take it as a matter of course, as others will. There is nothing to make a fuss over."

"But people must know *why*, Noll."

"Do you think for a moment they won't? There is nothing over which they are sharper than things of that kind."

"Well, then, if I go to the Vicarage, Miss Gliddon will see, and probably she will ask me."

"What? She is an inquisitive meddler, every one knows."

"If we are engaged," said Molly, in a low voice.

It struck her at that moment that she was not certain if they were.

"She will not ask you point-blank; and if she did, you must parry her."

"But I cannot parry any one."

“She will not ask you,” said Ormrod again, trying to convince himself that she would not, but thinking it highly probable that she would. “It will be preposterous for us to talk of ourselves as engaged to be married, when marriage will be an impossibility for me for many years. I fear, my sweet little coz, that we must add to our prayers the safe reflection that ‘There’s many a slip twixt cup and lip.’ Then if the slip happen, we shall be a *leetle* prepared.”

“And you can bear to think of it?” said Molly, after a pause.

“One must do violence to one’s feelings in this world,” Ormrod said, easily; but immediately afterwards he unwarily raised his eyes to hers, and the troubled wonder in them touched him into relenting. “Can’t you take a little teasing?” he said. “One may venture to jest over improbabilities. But all the same, Molly, I think this had better remain a secret between you and me.”

"I hate secrets," she said, vehemently.

"So do I ; never kept one yet ; but one must make a beginning in good ways, and this seems to me the best. It will do no harm."

"But if any one asks me ?"

He laughed impatiently, tugging at his moustache, and longing to scold her as a persistent little goose. It was evident she did not see the thing as he saw it, and would make a trouble where no trouble was, unless he yielded. A few minutes of consideration assured him that in the long run it did not much signify either way ; he would be at a sufficient distance to follow his own inclination serenely, if he were careful now not to compromise himself too far.

"Well," he said, "you must tell the truth."

"Then I may tell Miss Gliddon, and then you can come all the same."

"Don't say anything unless she asks you."

“Oh, I won’t ; but I shall be much happier, Noll. I could not bear to be deceiving any one, could you ? And it is so simple, and so natural, I think, don’t you, dear ?”

To this he made no further answer than by an awkward laugh ; but as it was accompanied by a caress, she was satisfied, and the happiness reflected in her lovely face once more bewitched him.

And so she went to the Vicarage, determined in her own mind to take full advantage of his permission, and thus secure him the right to come as much as he liked ; finding consolation, too, for her restricted liberty in the thought that she should be able to see him to the very last moment, since she was three miles nearer Newbridge Station at the Vicarage than at Alderdale. She had no suspicion that the arrangement contained more than appeared, and neither had Ormrod, until Brunskill walked in upon him one morning, and asked if he could spare him a few

minutes for conversation. Ormrod had the use of one of the rooms at Church House for painting when at Moorhead, and it was there that Brunskill found him. He was putting some finishing touches to a picture, and did not turn when he heard Brunskill's voice. Brunskill went up to the easel, and watched his work.

"Do you recognize the place?" Ormrod asked.

"Well enough," said Brunskill.

"I shall call it *The Wool-Winder*," said Ormrod.

The place represented was the kitchen at Alderdale, and against the open window were placed two high-backed, carved oak chairs, encircled by a skein of wool, from which a girl was winding a ball. But the girl was not Molly; and Ormrod, who had regretted that fact, was now thankful for it.

"You'll have heard that I'm off to Rome," he remarked.

“Your father told me. Are you going at once?”

“I expect an interregnum in Kensington—perhaps a couple of weeks or so. Mr. Quin wants to show me about a little, before the season’s over. I know less of London than of Paris.”

“Have you ever met the Mompessons yet?”

“I met young Mompesson once, he whose position is so pleasant, you know; but I know nothing of the others.”

“Do you know that Miss Laybourne is his sister’s governess?”

“Is she, though? No, by Jove! I didn’t. I may meet her, then, though I don’t know that I care to. There’s a portrait of her in that old folio that I came across the other day; you can find it if you like. And, by-the-bye, I’ve a little thing here I thought you might value; I’m giving a few away this time. I’d made it up to leave at the school-

house, but you can take it with you. It's Molly Murdock, sketched years ago as *Priscilla*."

As he spoke he crossed the room, and took a small canvas from a table, holding it out to Brunskill without looking at him, but with a peculiar smile of complacency. He expected it would be at once taken, but it was not. There was silence, and he found himself obliged to look up. The fixed gaze he met was so startling that he almost dropped his proffered gift.

"Let it alone just now, will you?" said Brunskill. He spoke thickly, and stopped to clear his voice. "I came to speak to you," he went on. "You may not care that I should have that, after you have heard what I have to say. It is right that you should know it. Ormrod, I saw you and her on the Moss on Sunday night."

"Oh! did you?" said Ormrod. "Well?"

He turned abruptly, threw the little

picture again on the table, and returned to his easel. Brunskill followed him.

“ You are engaged to her ? ” he said.

“ And if I am, what is that to you ? ”

“ You are out-and-out engaged to her ? ”

“ I suppose I am the lucky suitor,” said Ormrod, slowly; and when Brunskill did not speak, he added, “ Upon my word, I’m very sorry for you, but it’s not a thing one can avoid, you see.”

“ Remember that I know it for a fact,” said Brunskill, “ and that others will know it. She is safe where she is ; you must acknowledge it.”

“ I see now how she has got there,” said Ormrod.

He was full of rage, but maintained outward nonchalance, continuing to put a touch here, and another there, with a steady hand. Nothing more remained to be said, and Brunskill, after a few moments of deep and wistful thought, turned to go. Ormrod’s sar-

donic reflection was that he had unwittingly taken a good hand, and played it well, but he was determined not to show himself duped, or otherwise than magnanimous.

“ Pray take the *Priscilla*,” he said, transferring his brush to his palette hand, and twirling his moustache.

Brunskill took it, and Ormrod opened the door and shook hands with him as he passed. He then returned to his work, but, feeling generally discomposed, failed to accomplish anything satisfactory, and left it. His opinion was that he had never been in such a mess in his life. He had not anticipated anything like this, and until now had not considered himself as an engaged man; but his anger was against every one except himself. He had been cajoled and duped on every hand, and utterly ignored the fact that he had been the first to cajole. He vowed again and again during that day that he had not patience to think of Molly, when she had brought him

into such a quandary ; and yet he thought only of her, and at night had so far recovered his magnanimity as to yield again to inclination, and resolve to make the best of a bad business by acting up to his profession. In fact, he could do nothing less. He was certain that not only Molly, but Miss Gliddon, would be expecting him at the Vicarage. There was nothing better to do than continue to make love to her ; unless he wished to have a hornet's nest buzzing about his ears, he must pacify every one. He could only be deeply thankful that the girl to whom he was called upon to devote himself for the edification of a watchful public was pretty and bewitching. He also drew great consolation from the fact that Brunskill, who had so laudably endeavoured to punish him, was himself as one punished. This last was the subject of his most supreme satisfaction.

He found the situation, when viewed through the medium of the Vicarage, unde-

niably pleasant. Molly at once, in her innocence, assured him that Miss Gliddon knew—had, to her astonishment, known before she came ; there had been nothing for her to tell. She did not add that she had been hurt by receiving no congratulation. Neither did Miss Gliddon congratulate Ormrod, but she made everything very pleasant for both in an unobtrusive way—too pleasant and smooth, Molly thought, for the time flew, and she could not realize how it went. They had quiet strolls in the garden, quiet talks in the drawing-room. Ormrod was always good-humoured, always caressing. He really liked her ; and nothing came more naturally to him than to make love, especially when the girl was pretty. She surprised him, too, by her ease of manner and taking ways, that were never awkward or self-conscious, or out of harmony with Miss Gliddon's luxurious rooms and refinement. There was many a time during that brief week when she unconsciously

almost persuaded him to entertain the idea of marrying her, so lovely did she look with her dimpling smiles, so fond of him did she show herself. But she was a wild flower, and not meant for transplantation into ungenial soil. As her declared lover, however, he left nothing undone, and even one day brought her a ring.

Thus, the last evening quickly came. They had their last walk, their last talk, and a long-drawn-out farewell. He was starting early the following morning. The road skirted the glebe, and he promised to run up the field for yet another word. She scarcely slept at all that night, and getting up early, stole out to walk off her excited impatience. She could not help being impatient to see him again, although she knew it would be but for one little moment, in which, above everything, there would be the consciousness of a long separation. Miss Gliddon presently joined her, having watched

her from her window as she dressed, and pitying her restlessness. She always gardened for an hour or two before breakfast in summer, and she got Molly to hold her matting and knife while she went about tying up her phloxes and larkspurs. The garden was very gay and well-tended, the laurels pruned, the grass machine-cut, the borders bright with annuals that ran wild amidst sweet-briar bushes and an undergrowth of musk. In one corner was a bank of yellow roses; beneath the windows, and throwing its fragrance into the rooms, a wealth of mignonette. Everything was old-fashioned, making green-houses and forcing-beds conspicuous by their absence; but everything bespoke wealth, ease, method, and substantial comfortable tastes; and Miss Gliddon, in her spacious sun-hat and crisp grey gingham, was as much in harmony with it as Juliet Laybourne, short-frocked, tuckerless, her head crowned with a bat-

tered old Dunstable bonnet, had been years before.

As Miss Gliddon worked she talked, but Molly answered at random. Molly's eyes were fixed upon the road from Moorhead, but for long unavailingly. Even Miss Gliddon had begun to think it late, when at last the trap appeared, a dark speck creeping down the hill which was crowned by the church.

"They'll only just have time to catch the train," said Molly; "and if they miss it, will he come back, do you think, for another night?"

"They won't miss it," said Miss Gliddon, looking at her flushed face and shining eyes, and realizing how gnawing had been her impatience. "He may not have time to run up the glebe, however. Go and meet him half-way. He sees us. He is waving."

It did not take Molly a minute to leap the sunk fence and clear half the slope towards

the stile into the road. Then she heard an unintelligible shout from Ormrod. The trap was coming on rapidly—another moment, and she expected it to stop. But it did not. There was a distinct shout of “Good-bye; haven’t time!” and it flashed past. She caught a confused impression of an insolent stare of admiration from the Newbridge driver, a smile from Ormrod, a watch eloquently held up, and a hand waved from the lips. There was a cloud of dust, and she realized that he was gone.





CHAPTER VI.

ON THE VERGE.

It was not with his wife's approval that Mr. Quin had befriended Ormrod. Mrs. Quin was devoted to conventionalities, and condemned as Quixotic all that diverged from her own code of established rule. She resented extremely the unconventionality of Providence in gifting a carpenter's son as though he had been a gentleman, and the countenance given to the irregularity by her husband was a still greater grievance. It was preposterous that she should be sonless, and another woman, the wife of a working-man in a Yorkshire village, the mother of a son to usurp her rights. She opposed all

the means at her command to more than distant interest, making her health—which was remarkably good in the private opinion of her doctor—the plea for avoiding Moorhead, and thus compelling her husband to forego the delights of August on the Moors and September in the Inlands. But when, in spite of everything, he announced that he should make an artist of the lad, she refrained from the undignified position of futile rebellion, and gracefully conformed to the inevitable.

“Your father will never rest on the side of sense with the Ormrods,” she said, one day, when she and her only child, Isabel, were driving by the Serpentine. This was while Ormrod was still in Paris.

“Won’t he?” said Isabel, naughtily. “It depends on which is the side of sense. I shouldn’t have thought there was any question of it with papa.”

“You must know all young Ormrod’s

expenses are met by him, and I do not consider it fair by you."

"It is fair by papa that he should do as he pleases with his own. I suppose, some day, Noll Ormrod will come and live with us."

"Don't talk of it," said Mrs. Quin; "I only trust, if he did, you would be married and gone. He might flirt with you. There is no saying what might happen. But I shall beg your father not to run the risk. I know sufficient of the evil of such marriages from your uncle Richard. I wish you would think seriously of your cousin, Henry Mompesson."

"The thing might be for him to think seriously of me," said Isabel, lowering her parasol to hide an unexpected blush, of which she was painfully conscious.

"Isabel, don't be so detestably coquetish. Do you want him to crawl?"

"No," said she; "but he will have to take his fate boldly into his own hands."

“ You know what makes him diffident.”

“ Do you mean the miserable chance of Uncle Richard reappearing, or being found to have left an heir? I know the risk; and, supposing we were married, the blow would fall on me equally with him.”

“ But don't you see that he shrinks from imposing such a risk upon you?”

“ He does not,” said Isabel, firmly. “ He thinks very little of me. At present he admires Miss Laybourne more than any lady he has met, but he knows she would not have him, even if there were no risk attending his possession of the estates. Yet all the while there is a matter-of-course impression in his mind that he will eventually propose to me. That is what his consideration amounts to.”

Mrs. Quin did not venture to ask how far Mompesson's matter-of-course impression would meet with Isabel's favour, but her own impression was that she would not have said

so much or placed it so plainly had her wishes been likely to go contrary to his. It was a tradition in the family, that there had been an attachment between them from the early days in the nursery at Coombe, when Isabel went to stay with her cousins, to play with Lily and be tyrannized over by Henry. Mrs. Mompesson was fond of relating an incident that took place, unperceived, as the chief actors imagined, in one of the corridors, during Henry's last holidays from Eton ; how, after a long confidential talk, he suddenly flung an arm round her neck and kissed her, but instantly recoiled as she dealt him a blow on the ear. Remorse seizing her the next moment, she flung both arms round his neck and kissed him with sobs. It was a pretty scene, and one likely to dwell in the minds of each and bear desirable fruit. But it was a disappointment to Mrs. Quin that this fruit had not been borne immediately upon Isabel's release from the schoolroom.

She had made up her mind that Isabel should possess Coombe, and set herself as a flint against the possibility of Henry losing the estates through an unexpected claim from any heir of her long-lost elder brother. She considered that decision lay in Isabel's hands. If she would exert the slightest pressure, or throw herself into an outrageous flirtation with another man, she was convinced that he would at once take the initiative, and, out of sheer alarm, finding that she was necessary to him, come to the point. But to neither alternative would Isabel condescend, and Mrs. Quin could only watch and wait. The consideration of mutual affection, which was to Isabel all important, she did not allow to enter her mind. She could not have Coombe without Mompesson, so Mompesson must be thrown into the bargain. She feared that Isabel took sufficiently after her father to make a point of gaining more by marriage that was satisfying, than a handsome estab-

lishment and high county position, and was so blind as not to perceive that more than these *would* be gained by her marriage with Mompesson. But her lack of perspicacity was atoned for by her husband. When she incidentally repeated to him the gist of her conversation with Isabel, he leapt at once to the right conclusion, and determined to further by every means in his power the attraction which lurked in Mompesson's mind towards her, since he was the man of her predilection. He knew that Mompesson admired Juliet Laybourne, but treated it at its worth—as a fleeting fancy, which would not attain any serious proportion. To him, as to many others, Juliet presented the idea of a human icicle, tolerating admiration, but far from either accepting or repulsing it. A man could not make love to an icicle, could not even admire it for long. He was confident that he would presently turn from his distant contemplation of Juliet to draw near

Isabel. Anything more monstrously ridiculous than Mrs. Quin's qualms at the fact of Ormrod coming into the house while Isabel was still unengaged, he could not conceive.

Matters were at this point when Ormrod arrived. He found he was not at once to go to Rome, but had before him a London season. On his arrival, the house was quiet, exceptionally so for the time of year, as Johns, the butler, took care to inform him. Mrs. and Miss Quin were gone to the wedding of a friend in the neighbourhood of Coombe, but were to return in a few days. Mrs. Mompesson and her grand-daughter and Miss Laybourne were coming up to town with them, but would occupy a house of their own.

Ormrod listened to this without interest. He was not sorry to be able to establish himself in these luxurious quarters during the absence of the ladies. For Mrs.

and Miss Mompesson he cared nothing, and was too readily enervated by ease and happiness to feel a moment's curiosity about the changes time might have wrought in his old acquaintance, Juliet. It did occur to him to wonder how she would meet him—if with the old antagonism, indifferently, or cordially? But he was too much occupied to decide even in his own mind how she ought to meet him.

The intervening days passed rapidly. While Quin was at home they went out together, worked in the same room, and on one or two occasions visited in the evenings. Then Quin went away, and Ormrod roamed at will through the beautiful rooms, lost in admiration of their treasures of art and vertu, and enjoying himself in the most lordly style he could assume. During the last day or two he worked little, but lounged a good deal on the divans in the studio, reading himself up in the current topics of the day, and

endeavouring to acquire the last jargon of criticism and jingle of controversy. Looking back upon that period of oriental ease a few weeks later, he found it difficult to believe that he had indeed indulged in it without the faintest presentiment of what was impending. It seemed impossible that an absorbing passion should have burst upon him unawares, rousing him instantly from the lotus-eating phase of existence to the pursual of one object with every faculty of which he could command the consciousness.

He happened to be out when the Quins returned, but was in the studio a few hours later when Mrs. Quin came in from an *At Home* with a young lady friend, and Henry Mompesson and his sister. Mrs. Quin swept to a chair, and in passing gave Ormrod a frigid, scrutinizing stare through her devil-glasses, after which she sat down, with her back to him, thus giving him the benefit of her coil of red-gold hair, crowned with a bon-

net of red tulips to match her red dress. She was *outré*, but magnificent—an admirable foil to, but at the same time in harmony with, the mediæval character of the room. Her niece wore nun-like garments of white—clinging, creamy, and as soft as the delicate contours of her face and figure. Between them, Miss Tatton sat down, probably feeling herself, if she had perception of incongruities, a decided non-success, for her complexion was thick and her figure angular, and she had clothed herself in decaying green, with a short waist and Botticelli sleeves. She was the daughter of an archæological baronet, whose place adjoined Coombe, and a month in town each season afforded her the one opportunity of her life to gloss her country breeding with a veneer of fashion, or, as her father expressed it, to make a goose of herself. She had been endeavouring to talk to Mompesson in character with her costume, but finding he scarcely answered, was becom-

ing noisy, which was her idea of being animated. Still, however, she did not draw him, and he, by-and-by, lounged up to Ormrod's easel.

"And what sort of an affair was it?" asked Quin, who presently strolled in upon them, with his hands in his pockets, ready for the genial cup of tea, which he never refused.

"Charming!" said Mrs. Quin. "I never saw any one more decorative than the two Everetts, playing battledore and shuttlecock over a golden screen. Miss Laybourne explained the Gobelins, and made a sensation with her figure. She had a sort of wand in her hand, and might have been a priestess in a temple with the rod of divination. Really I longed for you, Oliver."

"Very Philistine of you to long for anything," said he.

"She wore saffron," Mrs. Quin went on, "and the effect was indescribable against her

dusky skin and dark hair. And then her figure! Countess Lective asked me where she had been brought up. Her girls row for the sake of their figures, but now she thinks seriously of sending them to the Moors to climb the walls and balance themselves on the tops."

"What an admirable idea, especially if they are chicken-hearted, and a stiff breeze be blowing! Did you tell her that was what perfected Miss Laybourne's figure?"

"I did not say Miss Laybourne's figure was *perfect*. She was fortunate in her occupation to-day. Lily," turning to her niece, "I trust you will follow Miss Laybourne's injunctions, as to deportment and development, in every particular."

"Don't you think she might do better, Aunt?" said Mompesson.

"She could not do better, Henry; Miss Laybourne's figure was perfection."

“I agree with you,” said Quin, gravely.

“So do I,” said Mompesson, but he laughed; and Mrs. Quin instantly perceived the toils in which she had been caught, and, opening her fan with a rattle, prepared for war. But before she had time to speak, the door again opened, and two ladies entered the room.





CHAPTER VII.

OVER THE VERGE.

ONE of these ladies was fair, pretty, and exquisitely dressed in the height of unæsthetic fashion. She glanced quickly round the room, and smiled when she saw Ormrod, making her way to him and shaking hands. This was Isabel Quin, who had a habit of being agreeable with every one, and pointedly so to any one who might be slighted by others. He went to get her a cup of tea, but when he returned, Mompesson had taken a chair near her, and she was talking in tones of soft sparkling inflexion, peculiar to herself and charming to her hearers. Ormrod with-

drew from their proximity, and finding himself near his easel, began industriously buttering the edges of his palette with his knife. He had a strange feeling that he was only looking at his palette to avoid staring at Juliet Laybourne. The subterfuge did not serve him for more than a moment. He was compelled to look at her by some mastering force apart from his will. Their eyes met as he raised his, but hers instantly dropped. She remained motionless. There was no movement of recognition on the part of either, but each was conscious of the minute observation and interest of the other.

Ormrod, however, continued to look at her.

She was standing on a comparatively open space of Persian carpet, apart from every one, and apparently equally unheeded and unheeding. Her saffron-coloured dress fell in straight, yet graceful folds, unrelieved, except by thick gold bands round throat and

wrists. The effect of these tints against her dusky skin was, indeed, indescribably fine. She had taken off her hat and her face was turned towards Ormrod, free from more shadow than the stained windows—which were uncovered when the skylight was shaded—threw. But the rich dimness of the light enhanced the beauty of her colouring. Her features were disposed to the Greek type, but, happily, were far from perfect, affording abundant scope for the play of expression. Her eyes were at once dreamy and brilliantly keen. She wore her dark hair turned back from her brow, and coiled close to her head. As she stood, absolutely still and silent, yet with infinite possibilities of eloquent action in every curve of feature and form—a Galatea waiting Heaven's fire—it seemed to Ormrod that he had not seen a more beautiful woman. He was by no means certain how she would receive him, but made his way to her without hesitation.

“ I should not have known you,” he said, when he stood before her, so near, he felt, as almost to touch her dress.

“ You are not changed,” she said.

She spoke slowly, and moved as though to pass him ; then paused, and glancing half over her shoulder, extended her hand. He took it. The next moment she was talking to Mr. Quin, and Ormrod threw himself into a chair and took up an illustrated Academy catalogue. But he saw neither word nor wood-cut. His senses were absorbed in watching and listening to Juliet.

Nor did this first impression fade. It occupied him unceasingly to compare what she was with what she had been. It was scarcely possible to identify this tall and graceful woman, with her handsome face, air of keen intelligence, and swimming gait, calm, composed, almost statuesque, with the old Juliet of Moorhead Vicarage, who had romped about, gawky and overgrown, in short dresses

and a battered old Dunstable bonnet, and been towards himself hostile almost to absurdity. Nor was it simply that he admired her. There was more about her than was to be satisfied by admiration. The more he thought of her, the more she puzzled him. She had gained much, but also she had lost much. Her calmness was not natural, her eyes failed to show the intensity of feeling with which at one time they had every moment gleamed and shadowed. He felt that whereas once her life had lived, now it smouldered. In this, he was only like others. No one of perception approached Juliet Laybourne without a sensation of speculation, whose excuse for watchfulness made its object involuntarily fascinating.

He had expected to see her constantly, but in this he was disappointed. Chance ruled their meeting, and it seemed that chance was not propitious at this time to their ac-

quaintance. For several consecutive days he often did not see her at all, much less talk to her. She came to the house ; once he picked up from the studio-floor a glove which Isabel said was hers ; again a flower ; but it happened that he was generally out when she came. Occasionally, in desperation, he went to the Park at the driving hour in hopes of seeing her with Mrs. Mompesson, but he only saw Mrs. Mompesson and Mrs. Quin. At last, he remained indoors, under the pretext of completing some work, and was once rewarded by hearing her voice in the vestibule. She even approached the studio-door, and he awaited its opening with an eagerness little short of anxiety, but was again disappointed. Isabel ran downstairs laughing, and voices and steps retreated. In a paroxysm of vexation he rushed to see, if it were but the skirts of her garment, and was confronted by the footman, returning from closing the front-door after them. He could

not have believed in such signal ill-luck, had it not thus met him in spite of every effort. But ill-luck was precisely what increased his determination. He delighted in opposing himself to opposition, whether tangible or imaginary. An object easily gained possessed no value in his eyes from the moment it was mastered.

But at last there came an hour when everything favoured the opportunity presented to him. The Quins went out one evening to witness a Greek drama at a private house, for which it had been impossible to procure an extra invitation, and Ormrod was left alone. But not five minutes afterwards, Juliet came, commissioned by Mrs. Mompesson to take back the last number of *Fors Clavigera*. She walked into the studio unannounced, and in the expectation of finding it deserted. For one moment of intense surprise and delight, Ormrod did not move. The next, he jumped up and

advanced to her. She was taken unawares, stopped, faltered, half turned back ; her eyes fixed themselves upon him, dilated into a momentary flash of joy, a blush surged into her face, and ebbing, left her pale. She stretched out her hands, but the next instant dropped them ; then again raised one, as though to forbid him to come near. This little scene passed in a minute, but Ormrod felt that in it he had read, as it were, a volume. And he was bewildered.

He turned abruptly, and walked to the end of the room. When he came back, Juliet had moved, and was bending over a table, in apparent examination of an etching. He watched her, fascinated by the sweep of her dress and the droop of her figure. But it seemed that she could not endure to be watched. He saw the colour again suffuse her face, and she bent lower as though shrinking from him. He pushed a chair towards her.

"Sit down," he said, gently.

Without hesitation she obeyed him. He was certain that her hands had trembled as she put down the etching. He was ready to be magnanimous; and to give her time in which to recover herself, he brought a fan of peacocks' feathers from the mantel-piece.

"Now, we will talk," he said, throwing himself into a chair opposite to her.

"Of what?" said Juliet, slowly waving the fan to and fro. In contrast with her dress of pale gold, it seemed to be made of jewels.

"Of Agnosticism."

"Or political economy."

"Madame Bernhardt-Damala."

"Oscar Wilde."

Then Ormrod laughed, and Juliet smiled slowly.

"Of ourselves," said Ormrod. "Of you. You have never been to Moorhead since the

day, years ago, when you all went away together. Why did you never come?"

"This is evidently the first time it has occurred to you to wonder why I never came. Only new ideas strike one so very forcibly," she said, with a tinge of sarcasm.

"I fear I thought more of the past than the future."

"Then I am sure you would not wish to see me again."

"But why not?"

"I was so detestable in those days."

"Are you certain you could not be yet?"

"I could."

"Well, be detestable. It would still add flavour to your fascination. Be anything you like."

"I shall not give you equal licence."

"No? Why not?"

She did not answer, but looked gravely at him for a moment, and then, to his dismay,

suddenly rose and swept her dress round on to one arm.

“Good-bye,” she said, in soft, emotionless tones.

“You are not going?” he exclaimed, springing to his feet. “We have had no time yet, no talk. You have told me nothing of any one. I want to know what they are all doing, how they are. I know, of course, of your loss—your great—”

He stopped, paralyzed by her look. She was staring at him helplessly; her eyes dilated in the effort at self-control, until they suddenly filled with tears that dropped in tortured slowness on to her cheeks before she seemed to notice them.

“I’m awfully sorry,” faltered Ormrod, appalled by those tears. “Sit down and rest. I will not speak; I—must I leave you?”

But again she took him by surprise, for instead of burying her face in her hands with unrestrained, relieving sobs, she strangled

emotion in a smile that was piteous in its mingling of agony and gaiety.

“Do you understand now?” she asked. “I never came, because I could not—bear—to come.”

He did not speak, only pushed a chair towards her, for she was trembling, and she dropped into it with a strange sound, half sob, half laugh.

“I have never told any one. *Why* do I tell *you*?” she said.

He looked at her as though he saw her through a mist. It was like a dream, and yet he felt in every pulse that he had only to put out his hand and her arm would be there. This was Juliet Laybourne; but Juliet living, moving, speaking, thinking, in an unfathomable, half-resentful way of himself. Presently she began to speak of Ted, his gentle life, his quiet death. The news of Ted's death had reached him years ago, in the midst of his work and light-hearted attainments of success.

“Poor fellow!” he had said, in hackneyed phrase, not giving a thought to the manner of his death, or to those whose hearth would now have the sad distinction of a vacant chair. But indifference vanished during Juliet’s recital. Long before she finished, he was touched to actual sympathy, and when at last her voice ceased, he ventured to express this sympathy in his look. She caught that look, faced it, and her fictitious calm gave way before she had time to think of what it expressed. She thought only that the sense of her grief and desolation was now no longer only her own, that she had shared them with another human being. Full consciousness of what Ormrod had been to her thoughts during years of separation, and of what he might in the future be, burst upon her. She turned in her chair, flung out her arms, and, laying her head upon them, gave way to a passion of tears.

Ormrod sprang up. He went near and touched her. But she took no notice. He

spoke in a low, eager murmur, scarcely knowing what he said, but she did not answer. Her frame shuddered with sobs. He realized that for the moment he was powerless to help her, and left the room.

These were the first tears Juliet had shed for Ted. In the early days of her sorrow no one had been able to influence her. Her mother might implore her to talk to her, might talk to her herself, laying bare the sacred sorrow that clutches at a mother's heart-strings on the first loss of a child—a sorrow of which, if women talk at all, it is to their husbands, for very love and full comprehension between wedded soul and soul. Laybourne might take her to the grave, bring her face to face with the griefs and sufferings of others, speak of the cross which each must take up in one form or another, and of the nobility with which the life of Christ has surrounded human pain ; her sisters and brothers might seek and find comfort in reminiscences

and tears ; but all was without effect on Juliet. Her mother used to think anything would be less terrible than her stony pursual of her duties, the parched stare of her eyes while she worked and laughed and talked as usual, her steady avoidance of the one dear name, and indifference to the prayers with which she and her husband assuaged their grief in the realization that

“Death is Life’s best,
And he wins most who earliest goes to rest.”

In the end this sorrow bade fair to paralyze her, soul and body. Doctors warned them that nature could not long withstand its ravages. Juliet herself was fain to break it, but could not, and began to consider her own days numbered.

At this crisis, Laybourne wrote to Doctor Thoms, the rector of Coombe. Coombe was only a few miles distant from Marshlands, and there was warm friendship between the two clergymen, as there had previously been be-

tween the Doctor and Mr. Gliddon. Indeed, their acquaintance dated from Laybourne's pastorate at Moorhead, when the Doctor had occasionally gone over with Mr. Gliddon to see him. Between Juliet and him there had always existed a whimsical sort of mutual admiration. He was many years older than herself, and the fact of his being unmarried gave the young Laybournes much romantic speculation. They were convinced that he had had a disappointment, and must be a misanthrope and misogynist. He was, however, neither, but a man with wide and cheerful interest in others, whom a solitary life had somewhat hipped, and who delighted in giving way to various odd twists of thought for the sake of the licence granted to eccentricity. He was generally taken to be older than he was, since chronic rheumatism gave him a slight limp, and often necessitated the use of a stick. For the last few years his home had been presided over by a widow, a distant con-

nection of his own, whose life had been full of vicissitudes, and who was thankful for a quiet home in her old age. He had found this arrangement very advantageous, since it admitted of his asking lady-friends to visit the rectory, and among these Mrs. Laybourne and her girls had come most frequently.

When he received Laybourne's letter he took a turn or two in his garden, then ordered the chintz room to be prepared for a visitor, and started on his mule for Marshlands. Arrived there, he took matters into his own hands, and after a long talk with Mrs. Laybourne, bade Juliet pack a trunk to be sent by the Grantham carrier, and took her home with him. They did it *ride-and-tie*; first the doctor, and then Juliet, on the mule; and they were four hours doing it, along country lanes, with woodbine on the hedges and bryony skeins among the ripening hips and haws and brambles; across a bit of shim-

mering marsh, with dark alders and pale willows silhouetted against the low sky-line, and through villages where he was known and greeted on every hand; and they talked the whole way, and now and then he won a laugh from her.

Then they reached the Rectory. His hobby was rose cultivation, and all his rose-banks were laden with their second bloom of the year. He took her among them, and waved his hand in the pride of possession.

“Here you are,” said he, “a thorn among them all! Shame on you! you a woman, with a woman’s noble heart. You won’t leave us until that heart is ‘as a tree of the Lord, full of sap,’ that shall flow freely to good or be tiss-tossed into hell-fire, proved lifeless. Now, my thorn, you are my prisoner, and I am Hope.”

“Delicious!” cried Juliet, throwing back her head, with somewhat of the old *verve* kindling over her face. “I am a thorn, and

I love to be told it. But you, *Hope*! No; don't insult Pandora's taste so far."

They already thoroughly understood each other, and he gave her the fillip she needed. In a month she was forgetting physical weakness and thorny attributes. In three months she was strong. It was Christmas then, but she did not go home; and when the doctor pledged her in the loving-cup of Twelfth Night, it was as his Christmas-rose. This made her thoughtful in a totally new groove of thought.

"It is a pity you are not twenty years younger," she said.

"Why?" he asked, carefully searching for a soppet in the great silver tankard.

"You know why," she said, suddenly abashed, and shrugging her shoulders at the irksomeness of the feeling.

"You think I should have married you?"

"Yes."

"That is true. I would, since you would."

“Thank you,” she said, earnestly.

There was a pause, broken by his holding up before her the stick to which rheumatism often caused him to resort in winter, and shaking it while his keen eyes peered past it.

“See,” said he, “this is my insignia of fool-hood. “Don’t you know we are two very naughty people to breathe such a word as marriage? You Siren! are you going to make this a Calypso isle? Are you dead to the all-potent social *convenances*? Don’t you know that it is only proper for you to be here as my friend, adopted child, grand-child—what you will; but the moment aught nearer and dearer sprang to the fore, it would be highly improper, until we’d stood at the altar as acknowledged spectacles for the common herd? Don’t make-believe you are in love with *me*. Some day you’ll hit a *young* fellow, the right man, driving straight as an arrow.”

“It may be pleasant to have a lover,”

said she, reflectively. "I've never thought of such a thing before."

"Never! Not Brunskill, over yonder, due north?"

"Brunskill? No," she cried, with wondering eyes.

"Nor that complacent sapling of a genius?"

"Not unless Love can reach the pitch of Hate."

"It can, sometimes," said he, wagging his head. "Nor any of the curates?"

"They are Sophy's and Carrie's prey."

"I see—small meat altogether."

"If you like."

"Then the madness has still to come, poor wight!"

"I choose to think it has come, in spite of the *convenances*," said she, with fascinating, arch perversity.

"And I choose, perforce, to rule that it hasn't."

She laughed. "Am I very improper?"

"I know not what you are, but I like to think a wholesome old thing—'To the pure all things are pure. However, not another word of all this, or home you go to-morrow. Now for that *Andante in F*, and then your beauty-sleep, Calypso."

It is certain the subject was never recurred to, for she remained yet two years under his care, which would not have been had he seen danger to her in it. They were two years of healthy study and relaxation, and ripening of that captivating anomaly—Platonic friendship. She was to the world as his daughter, but congenial tastes and sympathies made her more than that. At the two years' end he sent her into Germany for a course of music; then on into Italy, to study the Venetian and Florentine schools of painting; and finally joined her for a mutual ecstasy in Rome. But do or leave undone what he would, a yearning melan-

choly of retrospection and anticipation grew on her, becoming her normal condition, smouldering under her most careful gaiety, and making her that attractive Sphinx—a beautiful, sad woman, with eyes

“The homes of silent prayer,”

and questionings of Fate.

Afterwards she returned to Marshlands, but succeeded only in perplexing the commonplace home hearts, and being unable to settle down, satisfied her uneasy hankering after work and Coombe by accepting the post of governess to Mrs. Mompesson's grand-daughter at the Hall.





CHAPTER VIII.

WITH ISABEL.

WHEN Ormrod's immediate feeling of sympathy in Juliet's abandonment of grief wore off, which it did almost as soon as he left her, it was succeeded by one of triumph, that quickly gave place to pique. He had recognized the value of her confidence, and counted upon it as ensuring him the advantage of familiar friendship, an advantage in every way gratifying to his conceit, for she was handsome, clever, noticeable and noticed, and for a man to be seen at her side would naturally lead to the inquiry, "Who is he?" He

felt that she would give him *prestige*. But it seemed that he had counted without his host. She gave no sign of any intention to be seen with him, or indeed of remembering his existence. He was left to brood over what had happened, and to lash himself into impatience for what might happen. Meanwhile, the round of engagements which, a few weeks before, possessed the proportions of events, dwindled into the mechanism of mere duties, and life became barren of events because Juliet was invisible.

“Is Miss Laybourne ill?” he at last asked Isabel.

“Grandmamma is. She’s got one of her nervous attacks. They arise from mental anxiety—suspense, in fact, over Uncle Richard. I don’t suppose he’ll ever turn up, but she has periodical fits of remorse and anxiety, and the affair has always had a fascination for Miss Laybourne. She can control Gran better either than Sibbert or

mamma. Then you see she's not a very happy girl—that is to say, she's had a great grief, and she thinks it's meant to educate her. Very morbid, is it not? I often say the best thing that could happen to her would be to fall desperately in love. But she says love's a misnomer for pain. I saw her to-day. She looks a little worn, but happier than usual. I told her so and she thawed a little; generally she is as cool as an icicle. She cried, just a tear or two."

"And she rarely cries?"

"Oh, never. She did not cry when her brother died. She is neither cold-hearted nor proud, though."

"I should think she is nothing that is not good. I never saw any one like her," said Ormrod, in a more fervid tone than he was aware.

Isabel turned suddenly and looked at him with interest.

“Do you mean to fall in love with her?” she asked.

Ormrod blushed violently, and his brush trembled in his hand—two evidences of feeling which were to Isabel convincing, apart from his constrained laugh.

“Do you consider *falling in love* is always active, Miss Quin?”

“I fancy she would snub you,” said Isabel, with her usual frankness.

“Snub me!” he exclaimed, in disgust.

“Though I never knew her snub any one.”

“Then, why *me*?” he demanded.

“I don’t know. I am only a woman and of unreasonable opinions.”

As she spoke she looked at him scrutinizingly, half in perplexity, half in disdain. There are some people who, while fully conscious of being looked at, can appear unconscious and undergo the most penetrating observation with a preoccupied air. Ormrod was one such. He was using his scumb-

ling-brush, with his head slightly on one side, and continued to use it while Isabel noted every detail of his physique. She could not but acknowledge that he and Juliet would each be an admirable foil for the other, for he was a handsome, well-made man, of fair complexion, chestnut hair, and bold blue eyes. He was wearing a brown velvet painting jacket, to which a loose arrangement of collar and tie added picturesqueness. But though he might readily have been termed a fine-looking fellow, he did not assimilate with the position which he was proposing for himself. Isabel could not resist advising him.

“Mr. Ormrod,” she said, earnestly, “she has fascinated you as she fascinates every one. Don’t give way to it; you’ll cripple yourself for work. She never sees admiration, she passes it by, it does not touch her. They are returning to Coombe very shortly. Don’t allow your thoughts to go with her.”

“Then you think I may not see her again before they go.”

“I don’t know. It depends upon herself.”

“On Thursday you are all going to the rose show at the Palace. Will she go?”

“I don’t think so. She told me the other day she simply wanted to be back at Coombe. There’s Doctor Thoms, you know.”

“Doctor Thoms?” he repeated.

“Oh! they’re only friends, Platonic friends. That’s as much as she allows herself.”

“I should like to see her before she goes,” he said, naïvely.

“I am sure you would.”

“I wish you would tell her so, Miss Quin.” He had ceased to paint, and was regarding her anxiously.

“I will tell her nothing,” said Isabel, emphatically.

“Oh, very well,” said Ormrod, in perfect good temper. But she felt that this appa-

rent indifference meant anything but acquiescence—that, in fact, he was obstinate as well as self-confident, and would evolve some way by which to carry his point. She thought a great deal about this conversation, and endeavoured, on the first opportunity, to lead up to it with Juliet. But she found Juliet perfectly unassailable on the subject of Ormrod. She was busy at the time painting foxgloves on a brown satin panel ; the flowers had just arrived fresh from the Coombe spinneys, and she was bent on taking full advantage of their freshness, and much the more bent when she found who was in Isabel's mind and on her lips. Isabel could make nothing of her, and was, on the whole, more surprised by her reticence than by Ormrod's confidence. It would have been so natural to discuss him ; apart from interest in his future, there were so many associations connected with him at Moorhead, not only on the part of Juliet at the Vicarage, but of her-

self at Church House, when in past years her father had made full use of it as a shooting-box. But Juliet waived all these considerations, was devoid of her usual trenchant opinions, and would not even look up from her occupation. Isabel began to think the affairs of others mystifying, a climax in her experience which was simplified by the sudden elucidation of her own affairs just at this time.

In recrossing Kensington Gardens that day she met Mompesson, who turned with her. She did not know that he had been seated on one of the shadiest seats, and had seen her coming from afar, watching her indeed from the moment of recognition with a sudden rush of decided admiration which flooded his heart with a feeling to which, as he rose, he swore to give vent then and there. It was hot, tropically hot, and he commended her prudence for not being in the Park, where the gentlemen were wearing

white trousers and puggarees, and the ladies were invisible beneath their parasols. She was looking as cool and fresh as though it were a dewy morning at Coombe. Her pale blue gingham with its dainty lace set off her complexion and golden cloud of hair to perfection. And where had she got these fresh sweet peas that looked as though they had just been gathered from the borders in the Coombe kitchen gardens? Their fragrance and many-tinted pink were delicious to him, recalling those great walled gardens, whose sunny corners sheltered beds of lilies-of-the-valley and close plantings of rare polyanths; where a pheasant had once nested, and Bel and Lily and he went every day to peep at her; and there were flaunting borders of larkspur and columbine, and iris and pinks. Had not the happy trio run riot among them many a time, breaking the tallest spikes, tearing their clothes in the peapods, eluding gardeners, nurses and gover-

ness, until at last they could run no more? Those happy hours! Coombe, with its stately house and park and woods, were all inseparably associated with this bright and dainty Isabel. The hour was come when she must be ensured, not only for the past but for the future. He told her so, suddenly and without finesse. The shock of unmitigated happiness was almost more than she could calmly bear, and he saw this and took her to a seat where she could rest and recover herself. In the end, this most natural of conclusions had come suddenly upon both. When she saw him coming towards her across the turf, she had no anticipation of the event lying in the nutshell of the next few moments, and he would have been astounded an hour before had he been told that she would, at the end of that time, be his promised wife. She was realizing now, when all possibility of suspense was removed, how great that suspense would have been; and he

was thinking that only one other event than this could have proved to him how dear she was, how very dear—her preference for some one else.

“Thank God!” he exclaimed, fervently, “it’s settled. What a fool I’ve been to hesitate. I might have known you would have me.”

“You know now,” she said, happily.

“And you don’t dread the risk, Bel? I have Coombe now, and *may* have; but supposing Uncle Richard, or—supposing——”

“I dread no risk,” she said; “you and I shall always have each other.”

“In any case I shall not be penniless——”

“And we could go abroad to retrench.”

“Certainly. But I hope we shall live and die at Coombe. You suit Coombe; your style suits it. You forgive my aberration over Miss Laybourne?” he added, with a laugh.

“It was not aberration. You may

admire her yet," said Isabel. How far, how very far away, and how absurdly impossible, did the old qualms over Mompesson's love now seem !





CHAPTER IX.

SELF-CONFEST.

THE day of the Palace Rose Show approached, and Ormrod had not seen Juliet, although he had missed no opportunity for endeavouring to do so. It had occurred to him that she was purposely avoiding him. His mood was precisely what Isabel had foreseen. He waived her advice and undauntedly pursued his own course, writing to Juliet when he became convinced that he would not meet her. In his letter he begged her to go the Palace, urging his comparative loneliness and his desire to see again one whom he could not but regard as an old

friend, whose continued friendship he would value more than he could express. It was a short letter but a clever one, inasmuch as each word had been chosen for more than its own value, and was pregnant with meaning deeper than appeared on the surface.

He posted it himself, but received no answer. On the day of the show they drove out to the Palace, having arranged to meet the Mompessons at the fountain in the nave. Mompesson, however, met them as the carriage stopped. He was alone, and evidently had not a thought in his mind but of Isabel. Ormrod felt himself in the position of an outsider; she had always been kind and thoughtful to him, relieving him of all feeling of isolation without appearing to consider him isolated, and now Mompesson was walking her off with a grand air of possession. Ormrod looked after them discontentedly. He had heard that Lily was not there, but no one had asked about Juliet; and since it was

certain that she would not have come alone with Mompesson, nothing was left to him but the aggravation of balked desire. He was turning to saunter off alone and nurse his disappointment, when Isabel looked back and beckoned of him, even coming to meet him.

“She is here,” she said.

“Alone?”

“With Doctor Thoms. But his rheumatism is bad just now, and he can’t walk far. You have only to find her.”

“*Only to find her!*” Hopeful words, with asp-like meaning! He went into the Palace, eagerly scanning the crowd. It was like a scene in fairy-land, this great crystal dome, with the forest trees beneath it, whose green was fresh and unsmirched by dust, the masses of tropical plants, the big, cool circle of the fountain, with the dripping of its water mingling with the music of the band outside, the babble of voices, and chatter of parrots

swinging from bough to bough. The vast aisles were filled with a shifting, surging crowd, vying in colour with the dazzling hues of roses, over which seemed to be flung a veil of transparent foliage ; and he looked at it with a sinking heart. To search for any one was as likely to be successful as an expedition into the jungle for a mouse. He had no idea what she was wearing, and there seemed an unusual proportion of tall figures. He squeezed his way down the rows of roses, but found their fragrance overpowering and their luxuriance vulgar. Then he went up into the galleries, which were apparently deserted. Some one was playing upon the great organ, and the harmony rolled from end to end of the vast building above the kaleidoscopic scene below. He sauntered along, looking down upon it all in philosophic contemplation of its bizarre vanity. The fragrant, sultry air was full of sound, but nothing was distinguishable. It was oddly

chaotic, a Rimmel-scented, violet-powdered, Rachel-cosmeticked pandemonium of extravagantly-dressed men and women, bent upon deluding themselves and others into the impression that they were happy, and succeeding only in——

“Yes, Mr. Ormrod is with the Quins at last.”

That was Juliet's voice. He stopped instantly. He had come to a corner beyond which the gallery opened into a spacious square; she must be sitting just round the corner. He stood glued to the spot, without a thought either of advancing or retreating.

“He is very handsome,” Juliet went on, in the low clear voice he had longed to hear again. “I am surprised with him. He does his education credit. I should like you to see him.”

“Don't they march him out, then? Bad speculation for him—simply to inhabit the

studio," said Doctor Thoms, with jerky incisiveness.

"He does come out ; he is here to-day, but I have not seen him, and do not wish to."

"Why not, in the name of all that's holy ?"

"I used to hate him very much, you know."

"But you've outgrown such vulgarities. Is he fascinating ?"

"He has tact," and she seemed to speak reluctantly.

"The young dog ! I feel more jealous of his tact than his good looks. Handsome, clever, and tactful—not bad, eh, Calypso ? One of those cases in which Nature is kind, and one doubts the blindness of Dame Fortune. He has a career before him."

"A fine career !" Juliet exclaimed, with enthusiasm ; and Ormrod would have given much to see her at that moment. "It is a finer career than Mr. Quin's," she went on ;

“he has all to win, all to make, and it is in him to succeed. Genius commands success now-a-days. Mr. Quin means to take him to Italy; but he must be original in his subjects.”

“Give him some of your verses to work from—*Cyœraeth, By the Sea-ho, Ballad of the Yore*; all good for personification.”

“And there is another thing,” she said, slowly; “he must marry well.”

“*Cela va sans dire*. But compare well. Is its superlative a fortune or intellect?”

There was a pause. Evidently she was deeply thinking. Then came a short sardonic laugh, a Mephistophelian chuckle, from the doctor, and she seemed to start, speaking hastily—

“I hav’n’t quite decided; I——”

“Ha, ha!” he interposed; “I’ve a mind to keep in your good graces, so I vote for intellect and good looks. So do you in your heart. Out with it! Pish posh! no red hair and money bags, stumpy figure and

grimacing mouth, if a man wants to trade on his wife. What's such a woman in Society? A cypher. But imagine genius and intellect wedded. Come, Calypso, be honest; acknowledge that you award the palm to intellect."

"I always do," she said; and Ormrod could fancy how his keen, shrewd eyes were gleaming upon and baiting her.

"'Will you walk into my parlour?' said the spider to——"

"Doctor!" said Juliet, sharply, with a half laugh, and then there was a movement, a sweep of soft skirts, a loud and sarcastic "Ahem!" and the tap of a stick. Ormrod knew they were getting up, but he stood as if paralyzed. It was impossible to assume an air of unself-consciousness, and saunter up to them naturally in the ordinary course of things; and neither did it seem at the moment that he could get away before they should see him. But he must get away if he meant her to be unsuspecting, and to speak

to him again as a friend. With a superhuman effort he broke the spell that seemed to bind him, and ran softly along the gallery, until he reached a recess, into which he plunged. There he had time for thought, and determined, at all risks, not to lose sight of them again ; so he returned to the stairs near which he had stood, and peering down perceived that they were just reaching the bottom. It was easy to follow them into and through the crowd, and so out on to the terrace.

They did not walk far, and as soon as they sat down he went up to them.

Juliet was leaning back fanning herself, and looking dreamily across to the fountains flashing in the sun ; Doctor Thoms sat with his hands crossed upon his stick, his eyes travelling unblinkingly over earth and heaven, except when from time to time he turned and fixed them upon her as though, for once, she puzzled him, and he were trying to solve the conundrum. Just as Ormrod came up, she

had met this penetrating look with a provoking arch laugh. It seemed that she laughed readily with him, and the contrast was exasperating when, on hearing Ormrod's voice, she turned quickly with a glance of cold surprise.

But it did not abash him. He was perfectly cool and collected.

"I am so very glad to see you," he said.

"I am here because Doctor Thoms came over from Coombe on purpose to see the roses," she replied, with a touch of defiance.

"Roses are a hobby of mine," said the doctor.

"Then you will have viewed these with the understanding of the wise," rejoined Ormrod. "I prefer this view—the hazy distance against this flashing water and gay crowd. The gardens are pretty. There are some monsters somewhere, are there not?"

"Down by the tanks. I have never seen them," said Juliet.

“Perhaps we can go down presently,” he observed.

He had taken a chair on the far side of Doctor Thoms, and was looking across him at her ; but she avoided his eyes. He was, however, a quick observer on occasions of this kind, and felt rather than saw that she was nervous, a condition for which there was every excuse, with the doctor listening to and observing all. Ormrod was not nervous. On the contrary, he was beginning to feel himself master of the situation, and confident of managing her.

“Yes, go and see them, by all means,” said the doctor. “They are not fascinating creatures ; but then nothing was fascinating in their day, probably not even the serpent. Don’t neglect your education, Calypso ; it runs into unexpected grooves sometimes—narrow ones, too.”

Ormrod knew that this was a hit at him ; but he did not care, for Juliet had risen with-

out the slightest perceptible hesitation, and stood ready to walk with him. For once he was incredulous of his luck. Were they really going alone? It seemed that they were, for the doctor sat still, and Juliet was opening her parasol. Ormrod felt as though he trod on air as they slowly passed along the terrace and down the broad steps to the grass.

“It is my innings now,” he said. “It was awfully trying to my temper when Mompesson walked off *instantly* with Miss Quin. Of course, I knew he had a perfect right to her, but there was not a soul about whom I knew, and there was nothing I cared to do.”

“How have you spent your time, then? The roses were lovely.”

“Certainly; but one knew they would be, and I like to be surprised. I have spent my time in looking for you.”

“Then I hope you were surprised when you found me.”

“ That pleasure didn’t need any theatrical accessory,” he said ; “ and I knew you were here, and only wanted looking for.”

Juliet did not answer. She felt, as he did, that this was only light skirmishing to give them time for arranging their forces for the attack. She had not left the crowd and come down here to be quiet for the sake of frittering her time in hackneyed remarks, whose aroma of compliment was detestable to her. On the contrary, she had nerved herself to say a great deal, and to say it, too, forcibly and significantly. The exceptional opportunity, and a cowardly desire to get him away from the scrutiny of Doctor Thoms, had actuated her to respond calmly to his wish, and she really felt that otherwise she was unbiassed and free from individual pleasure in being quietly alone with him. But the very fact of her impressing this upon herself proved that she had feared, or expected, an intenser feeling, and that, had not this

opportunity arisen, she might have been disappointed.

It was Ormrod who broke first on to the debateable ground by asking if she had received his note.

"Yes," said Juliet.

"And you would not have come here but for Doctor Thoms?"

"No."

She spoke firmly and dispassionately, and he was nonplussed.

"You must have had some good reason, for I should not like to think you either fickle or inconsistent," he said.

"I had the best of reasons. I meant to act as seemed best, both for you and me," she said, in a low tone.

"And perhaps for me more particularly?" he asked.

She glanced at him as though impelled by some irresistible attraction. It was a glance, half passionate, half imploring, and made him

feel that heaven hung upon her answer. But she did not answer. They had come to a shady corner, with a seat, and she drew towards it, proposing that they should sit down, more for the sake of saying something trivial and inconsequent, and sounding her own voice, than because she wished to sit down, for no sooner had they done so than she regretted the motionless proximity, and longed to get up again and walk away. However, she might not have done so had she known that she must.

Ormrod was leaning forward, poking the gravel with his stick, and carefully intent upon the number of prods it took to make a respectable hole. He had looked at her once or twice, but her face was turned away. Never in his life had he wished to say so much, and been so utterly at a loss how to say it.

“You speak as though there were danger to us in friendship,” he said, at last; “but

surely I might run a risk without involving you in it. And there is much in which your influence might be of immense service to me."

"But it has not struck me as necessary that I should exert any influence for your benefit," she said, smiling slightly.

"If you could be interested, I should be grateful."

"I am interested," she replied, with emphasis.

"Miss Quin said you would snub me."

"I don't wish to snub you. I should despise a man whom I thought fit to snub, and I don't wish to despise you."

"I sincerely hope you will do the reverse," he exclaimed.

"I daresay I shall, justly," she said, and then she was silent, wondering at her irksome difficulty in speaking. The whole conversation seemed to go on stilts. He

had expressed himself frankly; but she dare not be frank, lest she should be free, and lapse into animated, fascinating reminiscence and anticipation. There was a great deal she should like to say, but it did not seem safe. She was equally afraid of him and of herself.

Miss Laybourne," said Ormrod, suddenly; "have you taken a vow of celibacy?"

"No," she said, turning and meeting his eyes with a large startled wonder in her own.

"And why do you shrink from admiration?"

"I do not," she said; "no, I enjoy it. I should be a canting hypocrite if I did not. It is pleasant to give pleasure, and I know I have the power in many ways. It is a gift, and commands admiration."

"Probably if any one could honestly con-

ness that they saw nothing to admire about you, you would have an impression that they were rather dense and uncomprehending."

"There is a little stupidity in the world," she said archly.

But though he was observing her carefully, he felt that that archness was scarcely spontaneous—in her voice certainly, but carrying no illumination to her pale and serious face. As yet she did not respond to him.

"Do you wish to consider me stupid?" he asked.

"Oh no! Why? How could I?" she said, turning again toward him. But as yet she had not caught the drift of this examination.

"You only wish me to accept myself as such?" he pursued.

"No; that would be absurd."

"Then how is it? You don't wish me to

acknowledge, even to myself, how very much I admire you, still less to allow the slightest hint to convey itself to you, and yet you credit me with sense and feeling."

"Scarcely with taste, however," she said; and for a moment he thought she was desperately offended; but then she added in a voice that struggled to be calm, and succeeded only in being tremulous, "You should not say such things. They are an offence to good-breeding, a solecism. *Je vous admire* must be suggested, not expressed."

"I will never again fall into the error," he said, bowing.

"I hope not."

"Simply because there will never be occasion. I have expressed frankly a feeling which will never have to give way to another."

"Oh! You do not know yet," Juliet exclaimed vehemently, and her low, passionate voice thrilled him. She had turned pale too,

a sign of feeling which he well remembered ; and then there rushed over her face a tide of warm colour that intensified the limpid brilliancy of her eyes, and, self-confest, she looked at him with pathetic, deprecatory reproach that was delicious and yet intolerable to herself.

Involuntarily, Ormrod rose and stood before her. A suspicion of the truth had flashed upon him, carrying him back to half-forgotten episodes of boyhood with startling vividness, and clothing them in a light bewildering in its unexpectedness. For a moment he felt delirious, and that he must act upon the feeling ; but Juliet looked up, meeting his awakened questioning gaze, and, conscious of her own wavering to weakness, took instant alarm, and rose too, exercising a strong self-control that staggered him into emulation in spite of himself.

“ You are talking nonsense,” she said, coldly. “ What do you know of the world ?

You have met no one. You should act in nothing without experience, and that can only be gained by time. When you have travelled and been in intercourse with others you will feel this."

He did not speak. He was pale with the effort at self-repression and the shock of being thrown back upon himself. But he looked denial, and her colour rose again as she walked on, conscious of his new knowledge, but battling against the longing to challenge it. Her mind was in a tumult. Her resolutions had faded into air, her intentions proved themselves chimeric, and yet she was elated, exultant, bewilderingly happy in a resentful, combative style peculiarly her own. She knew now how much she had cared for him years ago, and from what conflicting feeling love was gaining the mastery over hate; but it was her wish not again to challenge grief and disappointment, to be acted upon rather than to act, being possessed by

her idea of the safety and wisdom of those who take life dispassionately. Thus she struggled against this new satisfaction, though conscious that her scruples were theoretic, since human beings cannot be statues, and suspicious that feeling was not vanquished, and still held depths that might prove themselves beyond her control.

This excitement told upon her, making her flushed and brilliant ; and as they walked back, meeting many whom she knew, not a few remarks were passed upon her, and, necessarily too, upon her companion. Both felt this observation, and she kindled under it, talking on safe social topics, unconscious of the fascination low tones acquire when earnest over trivialities. And Ormrod walked by her side, spinning loose pebbles with his cane and listening to all she said, incredulous of the confession on which they had verged a few minutes before, except

when he glanced at her, and realized how different was this face, with its glowing eyes consciously avoiding his, to that of tranquil coldness that had fronted him on the terrace an hour before.





CHAPTER X.

ADVANCE.

ORMROD was wrong in the supposition that Juliet had purposely avoided him. She had simply been careful not to throw herself in his way. She knew they must constantly meet, for there was now little prospect of his leaving England before the new year, and he was fully identified with the Quins and their movements. But although she longed to meet him, she had been shy of doing so. Once or twice she had gone where she expected he would be, but they missed each other, and her temperament was exactly opposed to his, in that the oftener she missed

him the better she was able to satisfy her disappointment by reflecting that they were evidently not intended to meet. This feeling was in no way abated when she received his letter, and there seemed little chance of her seeing him again before they returned to Coombe. Nor did his letter affect her. She had declared to Isabel that she should not go to the rose show, and her resolution did not swerve. When the prospect of seeing him became imminent, she found that she both longed and dreaded to see him, for she was not by any means certain that she should be able to maintain her self-possessed composure, and not betray feeling, however slightly. She was not ashamed of her tears, and the relief had been far too great for her to resent her own emotion ; but the more she thought of them, the more it seemed that they had formed a bond between Ormrod and herself such as she had never made with any other man. If he, too, had felt this, then he must

know that he possessed an influence over her. So long as she was in doubt on this point, she thought herself safest away from him. His letter set this doubt at rest. It became evident not only that he had felt it, but that he wished to ratify it and push it to its utmost limits. But she would not answer that letter, or place herself in communication with him. She neither wished to be hurried nor to hurry him. Ratification might or might not ensue. It was written in the book of fate, and what was written would arrive. Involuntarily, her attitude became that of expectation.

She was surprised when Doctor Thoms unexpectedly arrived. She knew, the moment she saw him, that he must have come to see the rose show, and that he would persuade her to go with him. The hour had brought the man, and both were to play upon her. She decided before he asked her that she would go with him, and if she met Ormrod would accept it as a sign that it was

decreed they should meet and that their friendship should advance. She felt that they must meet with self-consciousness, and that, as a step to more than friendship, no emotion was so eloquent and betraying as that of self-consciousness. Doctor Thoms was, however, useful to her in more than the direct way ; he gave her confidence in her own powers of composure.

Afterwards, when it was all over, and she sat late into the night thinking, she was obliged to own that her composure had, however, signally failed her. She had begun well, but Ormrod's line of argument had been too strong for her, and she had betrayed trepidation before she realized that she was feeling it. She wondered greatly at the ebb that succeeded with such insistency the flow of the tide of her feelings, and became again passive as she groped for its significance. In the succeeding days, she met Ormrod casually in many places, and

under a variety of circumstances, but none afforded an opportunity for conversation of a private nature. The probability of meeting, however, filled their minds with constant speculation, and fired an interest which might otherwise have smouldered.

Doctor Thoms was still in town. He had intended to return home the day after the rose show, but sent, instead, for a portmanteau of clothes, and remained. He had been quick to take alarm for Juliet, and—for himself. The perception that another was in the field roused him to the knowledge that he was already there, and determined him not to yield an inch of his ground. But he could not yet seriously believe that Ormrod was a rival whom he must fear. He dubbed him an “audacious young dog,” whom she had fascinated, but whose influence over her could only be that to which every woman must temporarily yield when she becomes an object of adoration to a

member of the opposite sex. That this influence could be lasting, he would not acknowledge to himself; yet he acted as though he did acknowledge it, and, before the end of his visit, was constrained to face it as a fact. But it was a fact that seemed to him sacrilegious, and he swore that its fulfilment must not befall. He was a keen observer of character, and had in those days abundant opportunity for observing Ormrod. Apart from his own pretensions, he saw that Ormrod would make her no worthy husband. He was shifty, not to be depended upon, meretricious. It was preposterous that she should think of throwing herself away upon such a fellow. He was not, in this view of the case, actuated by jealousy; neither did he care that Ormrod was the son of a carpenter, knowing well that in these days it does not signify what a man has been, compared with what he is; but the hitch lay precisely in the contemptuous designation of

him as a *fellow*. He would not call a good man a *fellow* ; she must marry a good man who would do her justice, and about whose morals she would never suffer a misgiving. He was not by any means sure of Ormrod's morals, or that he possessed other than an apology for principles ; and this justified him in laying plans totally opposed to those Ormrod was laying.

At this time, Ormrod was laying plans with a resolution and clearness of aim which were utterly novel to him, but not disproportionate to the value of the object before him. He had been, in the first place, fascinated by Juliet, then flattered, piqued, perplexed, and again satisfied. But when he attained this satisfaction, it was at the cost of contentment. She might be kind and gracious ; but those counted as nothing, so long as she was not more. He must win the utmost man can win from woman, or it seemed to him that life would not be worth

living, and his own existence intolerable. He had almost forgotten Molly. The fact that he was supposed, at Moorhead, to be devoted to her as a lover, now seemed so preposterous, that he laughed, pooh-poohed, and overlooked the necessity for disabusing her mind of the idea, as his had already been disabused of it. His whole soul was bent upon winning Juliet. He found himself in love with her. She seemed to him a peerless woman.

When, at last, Mrs. Mompesson was declared by her physician fit to travel, he determined that he must make his venture with Juliet. He could not allow her to leave with the momentous question still in abeyance. He knew that she had already, with tact and decision, escaped from many opportunities that had been favourable, or might easily have been made so, for approaching a delicate subject; and he would have liked to know how far she regretted this elusion.

There was no surer index of his sincerity and single-mindedness at this crisis than the fact that he was troubled for the first time in his life by diffidence. He could not feel certain of success, and the uncertainty distracted and harassed him.

It was arranged that, on the night before the Mompessons were to return to Coombe, they should dine with Mr. and Mrs. Quin. When Ormrod heard of this, he resolved that he would then seize or make his opportunity. Probably Juliet was conscious of this determination ; but she was not conscious how she would be biassed. Doctor Thoms had contrived to exert an influence over her without obtruding himself, and she was doubtful of herself, and not unvaryingly encouraging to Ormrod. She, however, dressed that night with more care and thought than she had ever expended upon her toilette before ; and when she entered Mrs. Quin's drawing-room, she felt that the result was

happy. . Though she might not care for admiration, she would have missed it had it not existed. Ormrod had not the bliss of taking her down to dinner. She was apportioned to Sir Marmaduke Tatton, to his unbounded satisfaction; and Doctor Thoms sat opposite to her. Isabel had arranged this. She was not so absorbed in her own prospects as to ignore those of others, and having by this time gained a tolerably clear perception of the currents that encompassed Juliet, could not resist endeavouring to influence them according to her own notion of the fitness of things. These notions took an aggravating form, now and then, from her wish not to place Juliet on a par with Ormrod. When he found himself placed at table to-night, *below the salt*, as it were, his determination became the firmer. There are minds which rebound like elastic from adverse pressure, and gain impetus to tend in an opposite direction than that intended.

After dinner he sat a few minutes only over his wine, and returning to the drawing-room, made his way at once to Juliet. She was standing near the piano, looking through some music, and turned when she heard his voice.

"I want to show you my last effort," he said. "Will you come with me to the studio for a few moments?"

His voice was low, and he was unconcealedly nervous. Under such circumstances in her lover, a woman either loses or acquires self-control. Juliet acquired it, but yet acceded so gracefully that he gained encouragement, as she wished him to do. They went out so quietly as to be unobserved, and found the studio empty, but illuminated. Juliet took an envelope from her pocket, and placed it in his hand.

"It is my poem of *Cyoeiraeth*," she said. "Read it, as you wished to do, and tell me if you find it what you want for the idea of which you told me."

He did not answer, but drew towards her a chair, whose cushions and opossum skin he arranged before begging her to sit down. They seemed to have forgotten the picture on his easel. When she was seated, and he had brought her a footstool, he opened the envelope.

“ At this moment I have scarcely patience to read it,” he said.

“ I will repeat it to you,” she said ; and without hesitation she began to do so.

“ She girt herself in her robes of grey,
She girt them close around,
As they trailed with a tremulous, beating sway
Alow on the misty ground ;
The cold damp lay on her wind-blown hair,
Wild hair as black as the night,
While her face was fair, her feet were bare,
And her raiment misty-white.

‘ Maiden, who are you ? ’ cried I,
As she softly passed me by.
Mournfully came her reply—
‘ I am Cyoeraeth ! ’
(Ah ! the poison of her breath !)

“The cold damp lay ’neath her darkened eyes,
The drops fell from her brow,
Like answering tears to the echoing sighs
Of her sad voice, strained and low.
It lay like shadows on her hair—
Wind-toss’d, and black as night,
While her face was fair, her feet were bare,
And her raiment was misty-white.

‘Maiden, why come you?’ cried I,
As she softly passed me by.
Mournfully came her reply—
‘I come a little while with Death!
He calls me his queen—Cyoeraeth!’
(Ah! the poison of her breath!)”*

As she finished, Ormrod involuntarily sighed.

“You make me shudder,” he said.

Juliet smiled, somewhat uncertainly. She had thrown all her dramatic power into the recitation, and her eyes had gazed throughout into vacancy with a mournfulness from which he recoiled. The exertion had exhausted her, coming, as it did, close upon personal feeling, and she sat silent.

* K. C., author of “Songs of Many Days.”

“Who was she?” he asked.

“The Welsh goddess of mists and malaria vapours.”

“I wish you would not look as though you had seen her,” Ormrod said, “unless you will sit for her. Your face is haunting. I shall never get a better model for the subject.”

He was leaning against an easel, looking down at her, and she looked up involuntarily, thrilled by something inexpressibly fervent and significant in his voice. But scarcely for a moment did she dare to meet that glance that made her pale, and sent a strange, wild light over her face, a will-o'-the-wisp light of love that flickered fitfully, and then left her quiet and unresponsive once more, strong in her own strength, with conscious power still at her command.

He came down and stood before her with folded arms.

“You tantalize me,” he said.

“ I cannot help it,” she answered, scarcely above a whisper. “ You must give me time.”

“ I will give you anything you wish. You know for what I wish.”

“ I only wish for that at present.”

“ It is very little,” he said, “ apparently. So little, that I should scarcely be satisfied, but that it seems to me pregnant of much in the future. It is easy to wait when one has faith.”

“ It is faith that I lack,” she said, with wistful tremulousness.

“ In me ? Try to acquire it, will you ? I will give you until Christmas, when we shall probably meet at Coombe,” he said, softly.

“ I will try,” she said.

And he bent down, raising her hand to his lips, and kissing it in a way that made her heart beat madly, and compelled her to sit still a moment to recover her senses.



CHAPTER XI.

MISGIVINGS.

AND this was all that passed. It seemed so little, so short, that afterwards Juliet could scarcely believe all of which it had been significant. Ormrod did not dare to urge her further, nor did she feel that she could have borne him to do so. But in their minds everything of which they had long been conscious as importunate was settled, and both knew that it was so, and that a full and mutual declaration was only a matter for time. Meanwhile, Juliet, at least, felt that there was a halo thrown around her life, deliciously vague and intangible, but through

which she could at any moment stretch forth her hand to meet his.

They sat in the studio a little longer, then returned to the drawing-room, where the gentlemen now were. Isabel, sitting on a distant couch with Mompesson, saw them enter, and sprang up at once to ask her to sing.

“Have you been enjoying yourself?” she said, as they went together to the piano. “You have a tell-tale face, after all, dear; do you know?”

“I try to know,” said Juliet; “but I find it the most difficult thing in the world.”

“So bad already!” cried Bel. “Yet what a fascination in linking the old with the new. He was sure to fall in love with you!” she exclaimed, softly, with an arch glance over her shoulder, as she struck the first notes of Virginia Gabriel’s “When Sparrows Build;” and Juliet, inspired more than she knew by

this assurance, turned to the room, and sang as she had never sung before.

Doctor Thoms came up to her afterwards, breaking the silence that fell upon her listeners after the last lingering chords.

“That will do,” he said, in his dogmatic fashion. “Shut the piano, and don’t let us treat it as a pearl among swine by wanting another. “Now,” he added, placing a chair for her, “how much have you discovered of Narcissus’s previous proceedings ; how many Deorna lasses has he in that folio of his ? how many hearts has he broken already ?”

“We were not talking of——”

“Oh, no,” interrupted this peremptory man, who was in one of his most aggressive moods, “not talking, but looking things unutterable. That is the way. Well, now, you may be a fool, but I am not, and I don’t mean you to marry a knave ! Control yourself, and let us be sensible. You shall have

another talk with him, and my cool judgment shall set you straight."

As he spoke he got up and walked across to Ormrod, who was looking at some American woodcuts with Lily.

"Come and join Miss Laybourne and me," he said, bluntly, and Ormrod rose, flashing a grateful look to Juliet, under the impression that she had sent for him. In another moment the three formed a group apart from every one else, and the doctor opened a fire, which Juliet was far indeed from suspecting, under cover of Mrs. Quin's quill-scratching on one side, and on the other Isabel's audacious compliance with Mompesson's request for some ballads.

The doctor felt that the moment for action had arrived. When he entered the drawing-room after dinner and found neither Ormrod nor Juliet, a great misgiving seized him. Could it be possible that she was infatuated, and would listen to his suit? He

had during the last few days written confidentially to Miss Gliddon with inquiries about Ormrod, and her reply satisfied his worst suspicions. But Juliet's manner to Ormrod had misled him; he concluded his misgivings were unnecessary, and communicated nothing to her. Now, however, he resolved to push a sorry truth home upon both, but, as it were, by haphazard. He drew him gradually into easy conversation on various subjects, then referred to Moorhead, declaring that he never lost interest in a place he had once known and people he had once met. Cursorily, he asked after many Wherndale people, dwelling some time upon Brunskill, and at last seeming by an effort to remember Alderdale and the Murdocks.

“There was a taking little lass there when I last saw it,” he said; “a child with something of the *Babes in the Wood* story about her. Has the old placehipped her at all, or is she as bonny as she promised?”

“Some think her unusually bonny—the cotton-gowned type, you know,” said Ormrod.

“*Beauty of Wherndale*, I suppose? She’ll be putting her head into the noose soon. Who does she favour?”

“Brunskill wants her, but she’ll be hard to win,” said Ormrod, after the pause of scarcely a moment.

“Coquette?”

“Oh, dear, no!”

The words were uttered as by one having authority, and the doctor saw that he was off his guard, by the complacent smile curving his moustache. This smile was, however, repressed when he raised his eyes and met the doctor’s. The gaze they encountered caused them to fall again, with the further damning evidence of a blush and uneasy movement in his chair. These signs of concealment were sufficient, since in the doctor’s opinion he was not the man to blush from feeling. There was a pause, which Ormrod,

in spite of his consciousness of shifty purpose, was the only one of the three not to consider momentous, for he did not understand Doctor Thoms, still less fear him, and thought him simply grotesque, irritable, and prying. Juliet, however, was roused to suspense, and sat excruciatingly expectant. The doctor had forbore to glance at her, knowing his glance would have expressed triumph; but accustomed as she was to his penetration and quick aim, this reflective silence, like the cat's, that crouches before it springs, could only be significant. She had forgotten his deliberate purpose in drawing Ormrod out at all; the conversation had flowed so smoothly as to lull her misgivings over their agreeing; she was enjoying herself precisely in the safety for which she had hoped, and it did not even yet enter into her mind that Ormrod had something to conceal. She glanced at him, but he was staring at the carpet, apparently lost in thought; then

at Doctor Thoms, and his concentrated expression made her gasp. Instinctively she knew that he was preparing a master stroke, that strategy had bored its patient way to daylight, and that the daylight would be blinding.

“You intend to spend these holidays with the Gliddons, don’t you?” he said, turning to Juliet with a commanding nod, that enforced not only self-control but acquiescence.

“Yes,” said Juliet, compelled, she knew not how.

“Where are they going? To the sea?” asked Ormrod.

“No, no. She goes to them, at Moorhead, you know,” said the doctor.

“At Moorhead!” he exclaimed, in unmistakable dismay, and looking up suddenly at Juliet, he met her large gaze of startled and agonized apprehension.

“Don’t go! Not this year!” he added,

involuntarily, in a tone of entreating explanation.

“Why shouldn’t she go?” demanded the doctor, uttering the very words that were beating in her head without her lips having power to express them.

“I never thought of such a thing,” said Ormrod, lamely, and again he looked at Juliet, throwing into his eyes all the passion and persuasion of which he was capable. He knew now that he had been entangled; the doctor’s resolute, calm deliberation assured him of the fact. But Juliet might relent. Surely she would abandon this intention, of which she had been cruel not to warn him. He did not penetrate the stratagem, or perceive that she was not a free-agent, and now, on the brink of discovery, he saw the enormity of his conduct, and felt that nothing he could say would palliate it in her consideration. He did not think of Molly, but he saw himself denuded by his own infatuated care-

lessness of what he now held most dear—Juliet Laybourne's esteem and love. The thought drove him to desperation, and he determined to make one last effort to gain time and win her over to believe in him. He got up and put his hand on her arm.

“Come with me a moment,” he said, in a low voice, that strove to be self-assured and was only hoarse.

Juliet shivered, looking at him fixedly and sitting still.

“I must speak to you,” he said, still more urgently.

“No,” she said.

“And you will go?”

“Yes.”

He remained for a moment in the same position, and she sat thrilling under his touch, which had involuntarily tightened into a grip, that spoke volumes of his fear of losing her. It was the longest moment of her life. Every nerve was strained to the utmost in hope and

yearning that he would give some sign that he loved her, no matter what stood between them—some sign of which no man could rob her, not even the doctor, who, she dimly felt, would expect her gratitude for his penetration. And her patience was not in vain. Ormrod suddenly pulled himself together, and gave her full measure of the only thing possible under the circumstances—a look into which was crowded love, reproach, entreaty, and passionate, reassuring appeal. It made her dizzy, turned her pale, suffused her eyes with happy tears, swept the ghost of a smile over her whole face, and left her trembling.

Then he went away. She heard the door close upon him.

Isabel passed just then, and looked at her curiously.

“How ill you look! Are you faint?” she said.

“I was never better in my life,” said Juliet, rising, and involuntarily throwing her arms

above her head like a tragedy-queen. She did not glance at Doctor Thoms, who seemed to dwindle beside her, but he drew her apart into the curtained recess of a window.

“Is it too late?” he asked.

She laughed, with a gleam of brilliant defiance in her eyes.

“He is a knave,” urged the doctor.

“Take care what you say,” she remarked, quietly.

“You are his dupe.”

“Perhaps you are mine.”

He started as though she had struck him, but she was smiling, and he knew the arrow was not intended to be poisoned.

“You are intoxicated, drunk, but not with wine, Calypso.”

“Let me be,” she said.

“Juliet, Juliet! would you marry a knave?” he broke out, peering at her; and his voice rang with keen pain.

“Dear friend,” she said, touched and

touching, "after all I am a thorny rose, am I not?"

And that was as much sense or nonsense as he could get out of her. She left him, and went and sang again, a wild and passionate song of Schubert's, that had something dirge-like in it, over which her whole soul seemed to triumph.

Then they went home, and she girt herself up to go to Moorhead at last.





CHAPTER XII.

BY THE WHERN.

No sooner had Ormrod vanished from Moorhead, taking with him the outward and visible nightmare which haunted Brunskill's mind, of the Sunday evening on the Moss, than Brunskill was drawn into closer contact with Molly than he had ever believed would be possible, except under conditions now rendered impossible.

Circumstances are often cruel under the guise of kindness, and they had been in his case. When Molly went to the Vicarage, it was with the intention of leaving at the end of a week or two, but Mr. Gliddon managed during that time to catch a cold, which deve-

loped into a severe attack of bronchitis, and when Molly talked of going home, Miss Gliddon declared she must stay ; there were many things she could do, besides affording her cheerful company. Parish work devolved upon Brunskill, he being ready and willing, and Miss Gliddon devoting herself to the sick room. Every day found him at the Vicarage, giving and receiving details of work. It was hard to go while Molly was there, to have to keep up the old demeanour of unobtrusive consideration now that its life-germ had dwindled into a mere husk ; agony to control himself, to hide from her his self-knowledge, to be conventional yet not repelling. All these necessities forced themselves upon him the more strongly from his long self-control. Happily, Molly was at this time too self-absorbed to be very observant, but though she thus escaped the evil of perception and surprise, she ran into the cruelty of innocent confidence in him and his un-

varying kindness, absolutely drawing to him and compelling his attention. She thought him quieter than usual, that was all.

Thus there very quickly worked in his brain a madness which it became almost intolerable to keep under. And yet he did keep it under, he could not tell how ; but something helped him, kept him straight in self-denying purpose, clear of self-blame. He never knew how it was. He was only conscious of a burning unrest, of a constant craving to be near her, and when he was, of icy quiet that melted into fervent heat again the moment he was alone. He used to go up to the Vicarage chiefly in the evening, and find her either in the garden, flitting busily with scissors and matting among Miss Gliddon's flowers, or cosy with her work in the pretty drawing-room ; and there was no doubt that she was glad to see him. He was an old friend ; in those days she regarded him as fatherly.

But Brunskill felt far from fatherly as he sat by her, lulled by the charm of her feminineness, of her pretty ways that were intensely restful to a man coming in from his day's work among rough folk. They did not talk much. He was content simply to sit regarding her as she worked unconscious, rousing now and again from thoughts that carried her far away, to make some remark, ask some question, glance at him, smile and look down again. He watched and watched in pale silence, never tired of watching, absorbed in the present moment. It was afterwards, when he had placed his hand silently in hers, without daring to lift his eyes, and the door had closed upon her and shut him out alone, that that maddening rush of thought to the "might have been," overwhelmed him and sent him into intenser solitude than his walk home or his own rooms could afford, sent him up the hills to the vast, wild, quiet moors.

How awfully quiet they were, stretching round him for miles, their outlines unbroken in the twilight, or black as ink against the slow spreading of steely light, as the moon peered above their edge, and sent its smile to suffuse the sleeping valley and conjure up strange shadows! He used to walk for miles, plunging knee-deep in ling, sinking in rush and sphagnum, leaping from the gaunt rocks, startling sheep and moor birds, and exhausting himself physically and morally. But he wrung the neck of his grief, exorcised the demon of self, quenched the animal in him, and felt something else growing from which he did not shrink, but which he got to hug close home to his heart and live with—something wholly intangible, to which he could give no name, but which saved him from riding roughshod over his own feelings, through the accepted consciousness that it was good to live with, because it made him a better man.

Thus he fought his fight alone with God and nature, and gradually drew deeper and deeper draughts at the proffered cup of simple faith. Then he grew calm, self-possessed, with power to ignore the havoc worked, the blank made, and to look forward to the ripening of other interests.

But such a struggle takes time ; it is long-drawn out, and events pressed on throughout it.

Molly's visit came to an end, and she went back to the sordid atmosphere which was becoming more and more natural to the presence of Matthew Murdock ; for he was drinking more deeply each week, exacting more economy from Tamar, and losing more money in risky speculations and fuddled bargains with cattle-jobbers and wool-buyers than any other man in the Dale.

Molly went home to all this from her happy time at the Vicarage one August evening, when the ling was in its best "blow."

on the Moss, and the gnarled, wind-bent rowans in the hollow where she and Noll had plighted troth were aglow with big tassels of scarlet berries. She gathered some of them, and some yellowing bracken and fragile harebells from the rushy pasture where the cows were, knowing the bowls in the kitchen would be empty for want of her. There was no one to be seen as she crossed the bridge and went up to the door that was set ajar for the sunlight to fleck the sanded floor. Generally, Tamar was waiting to welcome her with a strong instinct of motherliness to a motherless girl, but far now from any sign of her big cap and bleached apron, there was no sound of her pattens, no chinking of milk cans from the dairy, or clatter of pails and thudding of sticks about the calves in the garth. All was silent, and she ran into the kitchen to put down her flowers before going to look for her. Matthew was on the langsettle smoking, and she spoke to him, and

was running out again when he called her back. His voice was thick, but she had seen at a glance that he was not in liquor, and she went back and stood waiting.

Matthew sat a moment looking at her. He generally ignored her, but even he could not but feel, now that she flashed in like a gleam of sunshine, that the old place looked the better for her presence. There was certainly something inexpressibly winsome and "betterly" in this girlish figure, with her shadowy eyes looking forth from the quaint framing of the hood, which still came more natural to her than a hat such as other girls wore. He looked and broke into a reluctant gurgling chuckle.

"I'm none maddled at his craze," he said.

Molly stared at him in uncomprehending amazement, never previously having seen him jocose.

"Has he set thee home?" he asked.

“Who, Uncle?” Molly said.

“Who? who, indeed? Just hear the lassie’s innocent ways! Folks are none so blind as you’d have them thought. I may be a lone man, Molly Murdock, but, by Heaven! I’ve gone a courting in my time, ay, a deal further nor ever he’s had to come; and I’ve had my mare’s tail clipped while she waited in the stable, and wasn’t laughed out of it, but went again. That was up to Angram, right under Great Whernside, and I whistled as I gained on the house and the lass came out to my whistling. It lasted a summer, and then she got tired o’ listening and I got tired o’ whistling, and she wed another man, who stepped right across the threshold at the first and hugged her without more ado. I was always a shy man, took a deal o’ making up to, and maybe thee’rt cut after me. Now did he set thee back to-day?”

“Who?” Molly asked again.

“Who? The Master,” said Mat, impatiently.

“Mr. Brunskill? Certainly not,” she said, and there was unmistakable decision and truth in her straight, unabashed gaze.

“And why didn’t he?”

“He would not think of such a thing. Why should he? He did not wish to, and I did not want him. He is very busy for Mr. Gliddon.”

“Men shouldn’t be too busy to look after their sweethearts.”

“Sweethearts, yes; but I am not Mr. Brunskill’s sweetheart.”

“Thee’rt not? How’s that? He’s fair crazed over thee. I’ve seen it long enough, and other folks have cracked on it to me. It’s none a despicable chance, lass. Times are bad, and he’s none a farmer to dance to the devil’s own tune of contrary seasons, and American produce, and free-trade, and floods; and I cannot fancy you settled to a bit.

counter. The Master's a gentleman, I've always said it ; but, gentleman or no gentleman, if he's been playing off and on with thee, by ——, I'll horsewhip him. I may be a drunkard and a rascal, but I'll none have a niece of mine slighted and befooled, for fingers to point at. No, by —— ! Why, thee'rt poor Tony's lass, for all thee'rt so fay."

The tears leaped to Molly's eyes ; she saw he was genuinely perplexed, and it perplexed her how to answer him, for the sudden realization of an unexpected fact bewildered her. She longed to tell the truth, since he seemed to have no suspicion of it, but somehow Ormrod's affection dwindled before this assurance of Brunskill's, and the brute force displayed in Matthew's knuckles, as he uttered his vehement oaths, frightened her. She had seen him in a rage, even when not drunk, and her arms knew what a gripping wrist he had when he wanted to emphasize his words. She dared not challenge either

when alone, even in loyalty to Ormrod, and yet she longed to be honest, and trust him not to be angry at the thwarting of his will, for that unexpected allusion to her father proved that there was one soft spot even in his heart, and she could have thanked him for it and for the readiness to take up the cudgels on her behalf.

“Oh, Uncle,” she said, “never mind me. I’m all right.”

“All right!” he said; “ay, you’re all right just now. We’re none ruined yet, but the time may come when you’ll want a roof over your head, and see hunger before you.”

“There’s my money. Use it,” she said, timidly.

“Your money be ——,” said Matthew.

She was silent, certain now that her money had been lost, so far as its squandering went, and regarding herself from that moment as penniless.

“Now, what will you say to him?”

“Uncle, don’t think of such a thing,” she said, earnestly. “It is impossible; and even if what you say about his caring for me be true, he knows it is impossible, and won’t ask me.”

“Then there’s some hitch?”

Molly hesitated. Should she tell the truth, and then turn and fly? She looked at his sullen face and powerful figure, measured the distance between the langsettle and the door-way, near which she stood, and wondered if her bedroom door were open, and the bolt well oiled. It would not be the first sudden flight by many from oaths and an uplifted arm, but Tamar had always been there to interpose. There was still no sound or sign of her, and the house felt strangely empty and deserted.

“Uncle, where is Tamar?” she asked, urgently.

“So you’ve missed her at last. Well, she’s gone.”

Her face blanched into a picture of dismay, grief, and fear.

“Gone!” she exclaimed, in a low, horror-struck voice.

Everything seemed to darken round her, the light to be blurred, her hearing to thicken. Matthew said something which she did not catch. She felt herself entrapped, and exaggerated the misery of her position into one of actual danger in the first shock of finding herself alone with her uncle. Then he got up and went out, and she made a slow pilgrimage round the house, finding to her astonishment that all the work was done, and everything clean and orderly; but she was too bewildered to ask any questions. The one fact of Tamar being away, and herself left to brave out alone all Matthew’s moods, whether drunken or sober, to bear the brunt of his churlishness and withstand his sottish familiarity, was too appalling to her imagination for it to grapple anything further. She

did not even wonder how he had got quit of her, how she could have consented to go without, at least, warning her, contriving in some way to communicate with her, or leaving a message with some trustworthy person. She had never spent a day, still less a night, alone with Matthew at Alderdale; in her idea, Tamar was inseparably connected with the place, and such a catastrophe as her departure was simply overwhelming. She lay awake half the night, with the question of what she should do if she did not come back beating dully in her brain. She knew she could not bear then to live at Alderdale, but in her inexperience she did not know if she had the legal power to oppose Matthew's will and wishes, and leave him. It was not the work that she shrank from, or even the responsibility, but it was the drunkenness. Her horror of a tipsy man was instinctive and deep-rooted, and she had never tried to overcome it. Tamar took intoxication as a matter

of course, and when Mat was seen coming reeling over the bridge, or swaying from side to side on his trusty mare, she simply "fettled" the lang-settle cushions, locked the cupboard, and despatched Molly to bed, with a stolid indifference that roused the girl's wonder and admiration, and made her vainly wish over and over again that she herself were not such an arrant coward. But as she never did more towards overcoming her cowardice than to listen trembling on the safe side of the bolted door, as he staggered upstairs with an intermittent accompaniment of hiccoughing, swearing, and threats, she was still a coward, and felt that small credit was due to herself for resisting the impulse to stuff the sheet into her ears, and avoid the fascination of anticipating each succeeding stumble and stutter.

And now she was alone with him, and subject to a scene of this kind any night. No wonder she shivered, and revolved plans for escape, for returning to Miss Gliddon, or

going to Mrs. Ormrod and absolutely refusing to come back until Tamar did, or a substitute for her was found. The old Grange seemed to have become ghostly too; never had the rats made such a noise behind the wainscot, the moonlight laid such shifting, eerie streaks upon the walls, the shadows assumed such human shapes, the river sobbed so, as it swept under the alders; the whole long night seemed so hopelessly long. Sometimes she scarcely dared to breathe, for fancying she heard Matthew's stealthy step going down to the cupboard where the gin was kept; and then again she tossed to and fro in useless, impatient longing for the moon to set, or the river to sink into silence, or more coolness to quench the dry heat of her little room. It was only at daybreak that she fell asleep at last, and then it was a sleep of unhappy dreams, too vivid not to keep her still restless and to make her wake again unrefreshed.

But broad sunshine is a jovial fellow when it surprises one late abed ; and when Molly awoke and found it laughing in her face in place of the haunting moonshine, she laughed at her fears of the night, rallied her courage and donned again her sanguine, happy spirits. What a fool she had been to be tormented by shadows ! She would act quietly and deliberately, without childish haste ; yes, even try to win her way, and exert a good influence over Matthew. He had taken her by surprise, but still he had been kind, and her whole demeanour should prove that she trusted him. And she must seize the very first favourable opportunity to tell him about Noll, for otherwise she felt as though she were acting a lie, and doing an injustice to one of her best friends. He must think no more of Mr. Brunskill in any other light than that of a friend, and she must be careful in nothing to give colour to that rumour, but in everything to prove her loyalty to Noll.

Thus she sang in her heart as she went about the milking and the calf-feeding, and wondered how in the world she had got the notion into her head in the night that the bonny beck was not singing, but sobbing, on its way. There was no sob in it now, as it glanced sparkling and eddying round rock and over shallow, sun-kissed and shadow-flecked and tree-caressed, like a happy maiden with lovers to choose among, and only a smile for them all.

Matthew, however, was in his most surly mood, and did not speak throughout breakfast, so she did not name Tamar, or try to glean any particulars ; but she had peeped into the room, and found all her work-a-day things in the drawers as usual. Her best gown and shawl and bonnet were gone, a fact which pointed to the probability of her having been hastily summoned to some event among her own kinsfolk over in Swaledale--most possibly a burying, which is the most

important incident in domestic Dale annals ; and when the meal was cleared away, and she had watched Matthew start for the high-lying pastures, where he was busy harvesting the brackens for cattle-bedding in winter, she ran up the side of the little Alder beck to the smaller farmstead where the hind lived. His wife was just issuing forth to her drying-ground with a basket of clothes on her hip, and Molly relieved her of her bag of pegs.

“ I’ll help you,” she said ; “ I know it was you who cleaned up for us last night.”

Betty Carling nodded.

“ Tamar came up and asked me to mind things a bit,” she said ; “ but it was to be against her home-coming, not yours, missy. She told me Murdock’d passed his word you should stay away so long as she did, for she kenned the Passon’d only be too pleased to have you about. When my man telled me you’d crossed the bridge at sundown, I knew

Murdock'd broken his word. I hope he was civil tull thee, eh ? ”

“ I got a fright when I found Tamar was gone. How long do you think she'll be—over Newbridge market-day ? ” Molly asked, as she proceeded to shake out the clothes and dexterously peg them on the line to the wind's eye.

“ She went day before yesterday. They fetched a trap for her, but her brother wasn't dead, for all they'd lifted him out of bed on to the floor an hour back. He'd been took with a fit, and was black in the face with choking, but couldn't quit, so they thought there must be pigeons' feathers about, for all Tamar's mother was the most careful woman in such things, and it seemed to give him the best chance of quitting easy to spread the bedding on the boards, so he'd likely be gone long before Tamar reached him. She thought the burying'd be three days after. Folk don't keep their corpses so long now-a-days, and

very well it is ; saves a deal of tallow and worry, and's a sight more decent, to my thinking."

"I'm afraid the funeral won't be until afternoon, so Tamar won't get back that night, will she?" said Molly.

"Nay, not from Swaledale. Make yourself easy, she'll none travel that time of day. The feast'll be going on an hour too, and they're well-to-do folk, and'll have a real good one. He was a widower, you ken, and I've heard Tamar tell of a ham that hung from a beam above his wife's bed when she lay dying. She used to look and look at it, and got it on her mind if only she could have a bit she'd be better. But he wouldn't hear of such a thing. 'Nay, nay, woman,' he said; 'that's for thy burying.' And she died, and he telled the tale when he carved it at the feast after."

"Old wretch! he deserves to be a pig in another world!" said Molly, with a keen sense of vengeance startling to Betty, who

only saw in the incident a nice adjustment of reasonableness and civility.

“ Maybe she'll stay over Sunday,” she suggested, agreeably.

“ Oh ! I do hope not,” Molly exclaimed, looking over her shoulder in alarm as she stood on tip-toe to “ fettle ” an unruly sheet.

“ I lay you're scared at Murdock's cups,” said Betty.

“ Yes, very much,” Molly said.

“ And he never gets sober from a market now.”

“ Never ; but Tamar does not care. I sometimes think she would not hesitate to whip him, if she were so minded. She really treats him like a child.”

“ It's certain sure Providence is soft over drunkards, just as if men did their best duty by fuddling their senses. Well, Newbridge Market is the day after the burying, by my calculations, and I lay she'll be back even if

she does think you're at Passon's. She's as ready to shake up the lang-settle cushions for Murdock drunk as she is to act motherly by you, missy—a sound woman all round, I call her.”

“If she isn't back, I don't know what I shall do,” said Molly, sighing.

“I'll do for you,” announced Betty, cheerfully clapping her on the back.

But Betty Carling up at the high farm was not Tamar Verity in Alderdale Grange itself, as Molly realized again when daylight faded and she finished the day's work with Matthew silently watching her through the clouds of smoke emitted from his long pipe. His silence oppressed her; she found herself stealing about with mousey steps, and would have recoiled from the sound of her own voice had she begun to sing and hum as usual; and when at last she went upstairs, she lingered a moment before closing her lattice, under an almost uncontrollable longing

to scream and evoke an answering voice out of the pulseless night.

It was after dinner the following day that Mat announced briefly that he was going some miles beyond Moorhead, to try to clinch a bargain with a new wool-buyer who had appeared in the lower part of the Dale, and was giving something like old-fashioned prices for good stuff. Molly liked expeditions of this kind as little as she liked markets, but was determined not to show any misgivings, and helped him to saddle the mare as blithely as though he had been going on a road without "publics" to bring Tamar back. Then she went in for his whip, and just before he mounted, she yielded to a sudden impulse and reached up to him with a timid kiss.

He turned and stared at her.

"What's that for?" he asked.

"Don't you like it, Uncle?" she said.

"Is it a bribe? I'm none the shaved

spark for such as that," he returned, ungraciously.

"It isn't a bribe, I know you don't care so far ; but," she added, wistfully, "if such a little thing can help to keep you right, don't be ashamed of letting it ; will you ?"

He did not answer, but mounted and rode off, leaving her to wonder, with a sigh, if she had not angered rather than pleased him ; and then she finished her home-work, and, committing the cows and calves to Betty's care, started for the Vicarage to ask after the "Passon."

She chose the path along the valley by the Whern. It was very hot, and not a breath of wind stirred the alders and oaks and mountain-ash that overhung the stream. But she had plenty of time before her, and rested here and there, now on a stile, now on a grassy knoll, until she reached the pasture at the turning of the valley, where Blaesfield rears its huge brown shoulder against the sky, and

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rolls downwards to Beggarmote Scar. Just beyond this the river disappears into a rocky fissure in the hill-side known as Goyden Pot, and takes its three miles' course to Moorhead Vicarage underground, with a rush and a roar, and a fiendish grinding of rocks and tossing of uprooted trees, terrible to see when the livid water hurls itself into the cavern in high flood. To-day there was no flood, and it was thinly loitering in with an air of complete innocence of din and fury. Above, a beautiful moory ridge stretched against the serene summer blue, alternating in rock and ling and scrub, until it clothed itself in black-green pines at Thedra Wood.

It was Molly's favourite bit in all her beloved Dale—better than the "Tops," than the Foss at Haden Carr, than Stean Beck, and even the Moss; and she sat down near a trough, moss-grown and grotesquely-spouted, to enjoy it all, drink it in, as it were. But she had not sat above a minute, when the

gate through which she was going, swung to, and she saw Gilbert Brunskill coming towards her, with great, even strides, and a smile on his face.

“I am in luck,” he said, sitting down near her without more ado, not at her side, but on the grass in front, where he commanded her fully.

“We are going different ways, if that be luck,” she said.

“I don’t think we need for once,” he answered; “I fancy you are going to the Vicarage. Well, I can tell you how the vicar is, and I have a book for you from Miss Gliddon, which I will carry for you whichever way you go. You want to read a bit of Ruskin, don’t you? It is fortunate Miss Gliddon has a friend who can lend it to you. It’s a mere fragment, a sheet torn out, as it were, and will only make you long for more, I fear. Now, need you go on?”

“I’m afraid not,” said Molly, ruefully.

“You seem ungrateful.”

“I should have enjoyed the walk and the talk, and now shall just go tamely back again, and perhaps find Betty peeping into my drawers, which will cost me a cough and sudden blindness.”

“Why *tamely*? Ideas are not confined to the lower end of the valley.”

“But you really must not come further, now.”

“I am going up to Haden Carr.”

“Then you’ll want your tea,” Molly exclaimed.

“If you please,” he said.

She was silent, alarmed, and perplexed; determined not to give him his tea, for fear Matthew should return and find them, and yet too soft-hearted to refuse it from what would seem mere prudish motives, only worthy of disdain.

“There is something on your mind,” he remarked presently.

“Oh! you must not come, you can’t come in,” she said, incoherently. “Tamar is away,” she added lamely, abashed by his silent amazement.

“A most excellent reason.”

“I could give you a better,” she said, nettled.

“I should like to have it.”

“But I will not,” she said.

“Yes, you will. I have a clue. The proprieties are penetrating even to Alderdale, are they not?”

She glanced at him, blushing, with a distressed smile.

“Oh, Molly!” he said, in a deep tone of regret and expostulation.

“I cannot help it——”

“Of course you cannot,” he interrupted. “It rests wholly and entirely with me, and no breath of gossip shall touch you. I will go with you to-day just to the door, and it shall be the last time.”

“You are very good,” she said; but he shook his head.

For some moments they were silent, and she, stealing anxious glances at him, saw that he was lost in thought. Many things had passed through her mind, as she looked from rock and river and wood, to bent and ling, and “Heaven’s blue,” before, with a deep, involuntary sigh, he spoke again.

“Since this has to be the last time, may I talk freely to you?” he asked; and seeing what he wished to see on her face, calm assent, he rose, adding in a voice at once shy and confident,

“Let us walk quietly on. It will be easier to say what I have to say.”

She complied, and he gave her a quick glance in which pain and pleasure were largely mingled.

“Molly,” he said, abruptly, “there are things in my past life which I have a fancy

to tell you. I have always thought I should like you to know them, and I see no reason, even now, that you should not. I can trust you to respect my confidence. They affect no one but myself, and I have never yet breathed them to human creature. Has it ever occurred to you that there is some secret in my life?"

"I have often thought there is some unhappiness," she said. "I have seen a strange look come over your face when you have been thinking, and heard you sigh; and you have no friends, and seem to be so much alone."

"Yes," he said, "quite alone; you are right. Walk slowly, Molly; there is a great deal to say. If that be true about the sins of the fathers being visited on the children, I am a doomed man; for, one winter night, years ago, when I was a little lad, my father came home drunk and killed my mother."

Involuntarily they both stopped and stood

looking at each other. She did not speak, but the mute horror in her eyes changed slowly to a pity which he—in his craving for sympathy after the impenetrable reserve of years—felt to be divine. But for that pity he must have turned and fled from the sound of his own words ; now that, at last, the horrid truth had been uttered to a fellow-being aloud, for the four winds of heaven to carry where they listed, he was appalled by the sound of it. Ceaseless thought, tolling through the centuries, has no potency compared with one utterance.

Then Molly held out her hand, and he wrung it, trying to speak, but failing. Blinding tears had rushed to his eyes, his face was one fervid glow of colour, that ebbed quickly, leaving him ashy pale, with a sense of exhaustion, as after some great exertion.

“ You will never tell it,” he said. “ Ah, I should not ! It does not bear telling. Such tragedies are best buried ; but not so long

ago I thought you would be the one to whom it must be told before—in honour—at any cost——”

He stopped, looking full at her—a look of which, for hunger, imploring, and contrition, she had never seen the like. It was the more pitiable, from the ghost of a smile that he managed to send wavering across it, and that told her of the brave, leal heart behind.

“I don’t mean to say that he did it on purpose; it was not deliberate murder, so far as I know,” he said, presently, as they walked on; “God only knows what it was; but it seemed of the worst to me, as he knelt over her on that floor, and she gave one smothered scream, and I could do nothing but shriek at him in useless, agonized passion, as I realized why she was writhing. At last she was still, and a silence as of the grave fell over the house. Then he got up and took me by the collar, and pushed

me before him up to the garret and locked me in. There was a window, however, and I got out on to the slates and listened. Presently he opened the front door and came out into the garden, and I, crouching against a chimney in dark shadow, saw him go and lean on the wall, his face buried in his hands. He was sober then, for he walked steadily. I wondered what he would do. I was certain he was crying, as he was in very truth ; I could hear his sobs, and they seemed to tear him. Once he staggered back and threw his arms up towards heaven, as though adjuring God as witness to his agony of mind. Then he went in again. I heard him moving about ; and in a few minutes he came out with something that I took to be a stick, and walking quickly across the fields was soon lost in the darkness. I waited for some time, but as he did not return, I made up my mind to get down by dropping from the house-roof to that of

the scullery, and so to the ground. Just as I reached the ground, a shot was fired in the distance, and it flashed upon me that my father had been carrying a gun; but I did not imagine the further horror of his having destroyed himself. I sprained my ankle in my last drop, but crawled into the house."

"He had placed her on a couch, as though she were sleeping, and in such a position that the jaw could not drop, had smoothed and dis-spread her waving brown hair, and scattered everywhere, dewy red roses from the bushes under the wall. I sat down, holding her hand, and fell asleep. When I awoke, there were people in the room. They had brought my father. He was found in a dub, shot through the head. He must have stood on the bank, so as to fall in simultaneously with firing. There was an inquest, but no evidence beyond mine. He had been madly drunk, that was all that

could be found in extenuation ; but it ensured them one grave ; and some good soul strewed it with more red roses."

" I should have liked to do that," Molly said.

" If ever you happen to be near that place, Cambley-under-the-Cheviots, go into the churchyard, and near an old thorn, in one corner, there is a low granite slab, with the initials ' M. and R. B.' Put a flower there, will you ?"

" Yes," she said. " And did you live alone ? Was there no house near ?"

" We lived three miles from Cambley, in a thoroughly lonely district, backed by the hills, and the house was fully half a mile from the high road. We rarely saw any one except at church, and were often snowed-up in winter. My mother never liked it, and was constantly begging my father to leave. The roads were bad, and in some parts dangerous, from their sheer unprotected height

above the river. When he was late home, she would stand by the hour together in the porch, with a shawl over her head, and often the wind and rain beating against her, listening for the ring of his horse's hoofs, and praying now and then aloud. He was so often drunk, and she feared he would fall off his horse into the river."

"And had you no servants—no one in the house?"

He did not answer for a moment.

"You push me hard," he said, with a sigh; "and yet I am certain the whole terrible affair was the result of an impulse of drunken passion that had affected his brain and maddened him. But it was strange that that access of fury should seize him the one night when we were alone. The hind had gone to a fair, and we were changing women-servants; thus the coast was clear. But he was not a wicked man, Molly—only weak and dissipated. I think he had always been

dissipated, as a young man, from what my mother sometimes said ; and after they were married it increased upon him. They lived in the south at first, in a remote corner of Exmoor, where I was born, and my little sister. She died there, and he would stay no longer. So they went to Cambley, and he bought a farm. My mother loved him passionately, and he, too, loved her. No one could be more affectionate than he when he was sober, and she hung on his every word and look. I always associate her with that line of Tennyson's—

“I do not understand, I love,”

for they were not otherwise congenial. He was highly educated—a First Class man of Oxford ; and she could barely read her Bible. People round knew him instinctively to be a gentleman. He had a handsome face and a commanding air. She was simply lovely, in the soft and gentle way distracting to men.”

“And had they no relations, no friends coming and going?”

“None,” he said, answering only her second question, though she did not know it. “The Vicar of Cambley sent me afterwards to the national school in Carlisle, boarding me in the town. He took the management of matters, acting for my interests at the expense both of time and trouble. There was no one else to do it, and he had always been our friend. So long as he lived he looked after me, and I spent the holidays with him, he treating me as a gentleman and impressing it upon me that I was such. He had sold the farm and invested that money and a balance of £150 in the bank, to be ready for the time when I must choose my calling in life. It was his wish that I should go to Oxford. ‘You are naturally a student, and a University course will fit you for any position,’ he said, with deeper meaning than at the time I could fathom. Mean-

while, I was to take a scholarship attached to the national school that should raise me to the grammar school. I did so, and was just on the point of taking another, that would have drafted me on to Brazenose, when my old friend died, and some papers of my father's, found in his care, were forwarded to me. I read them and changed my mind."

"Because you felt it right to do so?" Molly asked.

"I don't think I thought of the right and wrong at all," Brunskill said. "They placed matters in so different a light that I was completely thrown off my balance and acted on impulse, under the feeling that I could bear nothing to which I was accustomed and must start afresh. I threw up everything, went on the tramp, and arrived here just when there was a berth vacant which I could fill. I took a fancy to the place. I have been happier here teaching village children

than I expected ever to be again at the time of my coming ; so happy, that I can appreciate my troubles."

"And believe that the sins of the fathers are *not* visited on the children?" Molly said, with her sweetest seriousness.

Brunskill hesitated, looking far ahead where the sky dipped behind the hills, and then turning his clear, penetrating gaze on the figure at his side.

"At least there is amelioration," he said ; "let it rest there. I have a favour to ask of you before our parting to-day buries mutual confidences—a promise to exact. If ever you find yourself in circumstances of trouble or perplexity in which it should occur to you that I could be of help, will you come to me for help?"

"You are very good," she said, hesitating.

"That is not what I want."

"I know, but I was thinking it would

depend on the nature of the trouble. There are some which I could take to no one."

"I trust you will never be so greatly tried," he said.

"So do I; I could not be so brave as you."

"Well?" he said, inquiringly, after a little pause.

"Yes, I promise," she said, "with that reservation. I couldn't do without sympathy, but then you see I am only a woman."

"And thus know too how to sympathize," he interrupted.

"I don't think so," she said, shaking her head; "I have said nothing to you."

"I didn't want you to say anything. I hate the interest which keeps up a running commentary," Brunskill exclaimed vehemently; "which says, *Really! Oh dear! Goodness gracious! How frightful! How terrible!* You have listened and you have looked—that is sufficient; and if I have been selfish in telling

you so tragic a story, I know you will forgive me, and be glad to have eased my trouble. There is not another soul in the world to whom I would have told so much. Once I was tempted to tell Laybourne, but he had too much knowledge, and the risk would have been too great. I must have told him all or nothing. Now, Molly, I have not told you all."

"I knew you hadn't," she said.

Their eyes met and they laughed, Brunskill, however, stifling his laugh in a sigh that was almost a groan.

"What a comprehending soul you have!" he exclaimed; "you knew, you wondered, you were silent. 'Thus far and no farther has he told me,' you thought, and were perfectly proud and content. I can't tell you more! There is no occasion to broach it; my father's wish enforces silence on my part, and I should have only disregarded it under one circumstance. You know what that is.

Oh, Molly, if you could have loved me as I love you !”

“ Hush ! ” cried Molly, imperatively, turning pale.

They had reached the last stile, and he waited for her to pass through. As she did so, their eyes met again ; his ashamed and intensely humbled, hers looking tender pity through a mist of tears. That look, those tears, well-nigh unmanned him. He followed her and seized her hand.

“ You think me unkind ? ” he said.

“ No, never ! ” she exclaimed. “ How could I ? I know you too well. I am not thinking of myself in any way. It is you. I am so sorry for you. What can I do ? ”

“ Nothing. Ah ! you must not be sorry—not for me ! ” Brunskill said ; and he dropped her hand, standing still a moment, as he communed with his heart and sought stillness and strength.

“Molly,” he said, coming up with her again, “I don’t want your pity, remember that! I want you to be happy—if you have happiness, I shall have through yours. Do you understand? That is my conviction, and I shall act up to it. I shall pray for your long-continued happiness. As for myself, don’t you know there is always something to do for others to make up for what one misses for oneself?”

Molly was past making any effort to speak. She shook her head with a waifish April smile and held out her hand.

Brunskill wrung it passionately.

“God keep you!” he said, scarcely above a whisper, and so left her.





CHAPTER XIII.

A BLACK NIGHT.

IT was late before Brunskill got home that night, and when he went into his sitting-room he was amazed to find Matthew Murdock in the arm-chair, his head sunk on his chest, and sound asleep. The opening of the door awoke him, and he stumbled to his feet with a foolish, swaggering leer.

“I’ve driven a good bargain this forenoon,” he said, in answer to Brunskill’s look of inquiry, “and there’s nought puts a man in such good spirits as the feeling that he’s outwitted some one with greater parts nor his own in a general way. It’s like a draught of good ale to a dry throat. So I thought I’d

be neighbourly and call and see you, Master ; and your landlady said you'd likely not be long, so I sat down and waited and fell over. You haven't favoured Alderdale so much lately, but that seemed natural, since the bait's been gadding."

Brunskill did not speak, but he knew perfectly well that this was the clear plan of a tug of war that would be best grappled without skirmishing. He went round the table and sat down on the sofa opposite Murdock, who sat down too.

"Is my meaning clear?" asked Matthew, disconcerted by the silence and severe gravity of the other man.

"I suppose you mean your niece by the *bait*?" Brunskill said then.

"You're right, *bäarn*," cried Matthew, clapping his hand on his knee. "I thought you were a quick one, and I like your honest way of meeting it. It's only Dale louts that glint all sheepish and shy like the lasses them-

selves, but you're none a Dale lout, as I've always held. There's something above us in your breeding, and I lay you're square all round; I lay you're none one to shirk truths, or you'd none have that there picture on your walls for all the world to see. A bold stroke that, I call it."

Poor Brunskill! He glanced up at the "Priscilla" above the mantel-piece. It had that merit of a thoroughly good portrait—the capability of the eyes to follow those of any person who looked at them, and they looked at him now. It was his dearest possession. "Do you too testify against me?" he thought.

"You seem to forget that your niece and Noll Ormrod were pupils of mine for many years," he said. "When he left Moorhead he gave me this as a remembrance of both, but chiefly of himself. That is the history of my possession of it."

"I lay a sovereign or two would back the

job. It seems to me a real good one, and likely for cash," said Matthew.

"It is very good," said Brunskill, "and will be valuable one of these days as an early work of a great artist. But in my case it entailed no barter. It was a gift. He knew my interest in both, and that it was not probable I should value anything more than this."

Matthew chuckled, snapping his fingers expressively.

"He's a sly one, is Noll, and you're not far behind——"

"Not at all," Brunskill interrupted. "Had he thought for a moment that his own interests were at stake he would not have done so foolish a thing. But he knew they were not. When he found there was a complication it did not alarm him; he knew with whom he had to deal."

"There's something there I don't understand," said Matthew.

“It is quite self-evident,” said Brunskill.

“Ay, may be it is to you, who have light on it all round, but I haven’t. Will you speak a bit straighter?”

“I will, after you have told me your object in coming here at all.”

“That’s easy told,” said Matthew. “It was done in kindness, *bäarn*. I thought it was time you and the lass were making it up, and I came to encourage you by telling you of my consent and good-will. No offence, I hope.”

He was growing uneasy, feeling that Brunskill was rather too much of a gentleman for his lingo; too incisive, easy, and self-possessed to be an admirer of Molly’s, according to his idea of what that involved; and could make no headway against this perspicacious reception, which seemed to expect matters of great moment to come under discussion presently, and to be setting

aside as subsidiary the only one seething in his own brain.

“Not the least offence,” said Brunskill, without flinching. “But you are under a misapprehension, Mr. Murdock. Your niece is engaged to be married to her cousin, Noll Ormrod. I thought it was generally known.”

Matthew sprang to his feet with a great oath, and Brunskill rose too, resting his hand on the table and looking calmly across at him.

“Is that truth?” asked Matthew.

“It is quite true,” said Brunskill.

“By G—! and she may be thinks it a light matter to fool a man like me?”

“I don’t know how she can have fooled you,” said Brunskill. “Others have known without asking her. You have to thank your own habits of indifference and ungenial surliness for not having had it discussed with you as a matter-of-fact——”

“ That’s a lie ! ” burst from Matthew ; “ I’ve none been indifferent. I’ve oft told Tamar to make you welcome to our best ; and only t’other day I was cracking to the lass about you, and she made no such fuss that it wasn’t a fact that you loved her. As for Noll, she told me nought. He used to come loafing about the Grange, but it was always with his painting-work ; and they were cousins, and had done their tasks and *laked* together, and it seemed natural. I never dreamt she’d be such an arrant fool as choose that limb, who’ll turn her over, as we turn rubbish into a beck, one of these days, when it was so certain sure that she’d you too at her call, only she seems such a blind daftie as never to have known that. Why the devil didn’t you get first innings, Master ? ”

“ How do you know that I did not ? ”
Brunskill asked.

“ I ken because she was so innocent over

being your sweetheart, and she's none the lass to put on or lie."

"There you're right," said Brunskill.

"He'll never marry her," said Matthew, with an insinuating leer, after a moment's pause.

"What has that to do with me? I am her friend now, and always shall be."

"Friend—ay, *bäarn*! But such friendship's ticklish, like the Whern overflowing its banks and never stopping till some deathly harm's done. Now, I've no mind to have my name fouled, remember."

"You brute!" said Brunskill, in a deep tone of rage.

"I've reason on my side," said Matthew, sullenly.

"The reason of a sot—not the respectable reason of a respectable man. The sooner you understand that this matter rests between her and me alone, the better. She and I are under perfect mutual understanding; she has

no more to fear from me than Noll has, and beyond that understanding I shall take no step by the authority or at the instigation of any man."

"Thee'rt a fool, a damnable fool! Thy love's been calf-love, then?" said Matthew, with a long taunting jeer.

"That's best known to myself," said Brunskill, under an overwhelming desire to fell him; but, instead, he strode to the door, and held it wide open, without speaking.

Murdock looked at him, and knew he must go. Brunskill was deathly pale; his eyes glowed with suppressed passion, the veins on his brow stood out like whip-cord; he looked as though he could have fallen upon him and shaken the breath from his body; and Matthew slunk past trembling.

He went to the inn for his horse, and drank deeply while waiting for it, the anger at his balked shrewdness focussing the while

round Molly. She was unprotected and the weaker ; he could wreak his anger on her. This idea, once hatched, gained force and feasibility as the fumes of dry liquor mounted to his brain, and bred a madman's desperate expedencies. All the way home he brooded over them, chuckling exultingly at Tamar's absence, plotting revenge, nursing the blind rage natural to the thwarting of his will, and swearing with terrible oaths to punish her for his own obtrusive folly in going to Brunskill on such a fool's errand.

But on one point he calculated wrongly. Tamar had returned. Molly found her pattering about the house when she went in after her walk, and they had had a long talk after tea. Tamar had told her all about the funeral, and Molly had told Tamar all about her talk with Matthew, and asked her to tell him of her engagement. She did not name Brunskill, but Tamar knew the bent of

Matthew's mind on the question, and easily guessed that some urgent representation had made her, too, urgent for a full confession. It was hard work with Tamar not to expostulate before this decided step was taken. Preference for Brunskill's suit was one of the few points in which she agreed with Matthew; indeed, in her opinion, none but a fool or a lass-in-love would have hesitated a moment between the two. "Noll's a fair weather chap," she had said once to Molly. In her own mind she added, "And the master'd be the stronger and cannier the more the wind blew and the rain fell, like the house built on a rock." But still an instinct of delicacy forbad her to make the comparison aloud without her advice having been asked, and she saw Molly was a "lass-in-love," and that there was no doing anything with her.

And then they heard the horse's hoofs on the bridge, a great thumping in the stable,

and Matthew's low stormy swearing as he crossed the yard. They had heard such sounds before a dozen times, and yet to-night it struck both of them somehow that a climax had come, and they looked at each other with foreboding.

Tamar was for hustling Molly off to bed ; but for the first time she resisted and stood her ground.

"Eh ! my lassie," said Tamar, "he's had a bout with some one ; he's none gone in liquor, just dipped, and that's always worst. There's no saying that he won't fall on thee if he's been hearing of Noll."

"Very well," said Molly, "I was a coward the other day ; I won't be now. I'll face the truth and have done with it."

Matthew came in, and he carried a gig-whip in his hand, whether from accident or intention they never knew. But when they looked at his face, it was easy to associate the whip with his mood, easy to remember

that men had raised such things against women when the scathing of words and curses did not seem to touch them sufficiently.

It made Tamar shudder ; but she did not lose her presence of mind, and, going up to him, she touched it, saying, cheerfully,

“ Why, Matther, man, the passage peg’s the place for that, as ye ken. Let me lay it by.”

Matthew, however, stared at her.

“ You here ! ” he said, pulling the whip from her. “ Well, it makes no difference now ; no more difference nor there is between this here stout piece of leather and that there muzzle-loader,” pointing to one of the villainous old guns slung on crockets above the mantel-piece. “ Either’ll serve my purpose if things go against me. It’s none you I’ve to deal with now, Tamar Verity ; it’s my niece. Molly ! ”

“ Yes, Uncle,” said Molly, turning and facing him.

“ I’ll uncle thee ! ” said Matthew, raising one hand menacingly ; “ I’ll uncle thee, thou bold, brazen lass, with thy wilfulness and foolishness ! Such a mess as you’re making of yourself ! What are you thinking about, to turn from a man like the Master yonder, for a sly dog like Noll Ormrod, and make a laughing-stock of me ; me, the shrewdest man in all t’Dale, who’s never been outwitted by buyer or jobber ! And next thing’ll be you’ll be a laughing-stock too, all the folk pointing and jibing at t’lass who believed Noll Ormrod ’d put up with such as her when he was a grand Londoner, with fine ladies to choose among. What’ll you do then, eh ? ”

“ I can think of that when he comes to it,” she said.

“ Think !—ay, and maybe expect the Master’ll be ready to take up with other men’s cast-offs. Thee’rt fair a sucking-lambkin, Molly. Tamar, dost fancy thy cade-lamb ? ”

“ I should expect nothing of the kind ! ”
Molly exclaimed.

“ What would you expect, then ? Flirky ways are none content with spinster days. There’s no saying what you mightn’t come to—it might be that mucky and foul ; for if you’re a maid you’ll have to face the world, maybe in hunger and starvation. Molly, if you tak the Master, I’ll die more easy when my time comes—meet your father more easy ; poor Tony, who was daft enough to trust me.”

“ No, Uncle,” she said, undauntedly ; “ I’m very sorry, but I’m daft enough too to trust Noll. I’ll never break faith with him.”

“ You won’t ? ”

“ Never ! ” she repeated. “ And if you have anything on your conscience, if you have done wrong by me, is it I who must punish another, letting alone myself, to make your mind easy ? Uncle, if you’d gone straight,

you'd have done your duty by me. I cannot help you to mend it if you've gone crooked."

"—— you!"

She did not speak.

"Maybe you think you've got right on your side?"

"Yes, I have," she said.

"And what's right by might?" he asked; "God or the devil, which is the stronger? There's nought o' God in my heart, and there's a canny bit o' the devil both in my hand and heart, and he shall have a fling, ay, as sure as there's a hell gaping, and you're two weakly women!"

"Run to the door, and get away sharp and call Carlings," said Tamar, in an urgent whisper.

"You go," said Molly; "I'm not a bit frightened."

"He's mad ——"

But Matthew had overheard. He turned

and closed the door, tightened his hold on the whip-handle and advanced into the middle of the kitchen. Then he raised the whip, swung the lash dexterously round his head, and brought it on to the floor with a hiss, after a curving sweep that switched the pewter-dishes on the delf-rack and the brass candle-sticks on the mantel-piece.

It was done with a diabolical deliberation that spoke volumes for his intentions. Molly looked round wildly. Tamar was signalling to her to edge behind him ; but she stood paralyzed. Both were certain that the next slash would fall on them, and Tamar's last hope was to save Molly. But she saw she could not move ; suspense and expectation chained her to the spot where she stood. So Tamar hazarded a plunge, and gained the door. Matthew turned, but too late. She had wrenched it open, and was speeding down the passage, then across the garth, with cries for help ; until in the unmooned gloom of

the falling night, she reached the High Farm, and battered at the door with clenched fists, until she was answered and heard hasty steps coming downstairs.

Then she sped back, and in recrossing the garth was dimly conscious of hearing a gate clash, the gate just beyond the bridge she thought, but was too dazed and scared by the silence about the house to attach any importance to it at the moment. As she went in, some one ran against her, clutched her, and then pushed her away with a force that sent her staggering against the wall. It was Murdock, hurrying out blindly. But he did not speak, and went on in a stumbling, spasmodic way which made it evident he could not go far or fast.

Tamar let him be. It was for men to deal with such as he. She sped on into the unstirred silence and gloom of the kitchen. The candle had been knocked over, and all was in darkness. She groped about for

matches in sickening fear—almost expectation—that every moment foot or fingers would come in contact with something soft, motionless, yielding.

But they did not, and at last she struck a light and threw a piercing glance all round into the wainscoted, black shadowiness of the big old place. There was, however, nothing in it that either was or had been alive; but another blow had evidently been attempted, for the brass candlesticks were on the hearthstone, and one of the guns was hanging slantwise from one crocket. That told a tale. Surely the whip had caught in it and lost its impetus. She realized this with unspeakable relief, and could face the question, “Where is Molly?”

Carling had now followed her, and in a few words she told him all. A search for Matthew was cautiously instituted, cautiously, because she believed the drink had at last flown to his brain. But they soon found

him, leaning against the stable-door, subdued and confused, and willing to go quietly to bed.

Then Tamar's thoughts turned wholly to Molly. From the moment of leaving the kitchen she had neither seen nor heard anything of her. No sound had reached her ears, although she had expected the sudden sharp cry of pain rendered sharper by fear ; but whatever had passed had been done in a silence more hideous than sound. It was only after searching all through the house and buildings that she suddenly remembered the clashing of the gate ; and wondering she had not before associated it with Molly, she and Carling set out on to the Moss in search of her.

Meanwhile, Molly was far on the way to Moorhead. She had not paused once in her wild run. She was impelled by a fear too great for anything but rapid action, for to her too it had seemed as though Matthew had

gone mad. She scarcely knew how she had got out of the kitchen. She remembered there was a sudden darkness from the stroke of the whip that was meant to reach her, catching the candlestick, and throwing it down on the floor with a jangle that evoked a horrible oath from him. She had had presence of mind to see the opportunity for escape which this gave her, if only she could reach the door without coming in contact with him. Standing still for a moment or two until she was sure of his position by his fumbling for matches among the clinking things on the chimney-piece, and the volley of oaths to which he gave utterance in his baulked rage, she took two or three noiseless steps out into the passage, and then, lapsing into a hasty, frightened run, made instinctively for the gate on to the high road.

Once on the Moss, she felt comparatively safe. She had listened as she ran, and was sure she was not pursued, but it did not occur

to her to slacken her speed. While she had stood in the kitchen, with her nerves and energies strained to the utmost to seize the opportunity for escape, there had come before her a vivid picture of Brunskill's mother lying dead upon the floor after that "*useless agonized writhing*" had ceased, and this, growing more vivid every moment, augmented her excited trepidation.

The night was dark and close. There was no moon, and the sky was too cloudy for stars. Occasionally there came a flash of lightning, summer lightning, that glanced betwixt the ragged edges of the clouds scudding above her. She could not accustom herself to these flashes, but in the suspense of expecting them, became exhausted and breathless. Each one startled her into a faint cry, for her nerves were unstrung, and she was tired with hurrying over the stones and ruts of the rough road. Each one, however, showed her where she was, for the

darkness was thickening, and when she stretched out her hands into it, it seemed to possess a substance whose consistency she could calculate. To her excited brain, it seemed like huge wings that poised without one flap of motion. She felt continually that she ought to reach their edge and emerge into the buoyant light and air of day.

But every quivering flash only confirmed the vastness of the night, and showed her the clouds parting and meeting and hurrying together with a certainty of aim and motion that seemed as though it must produce a sound. She would have been glad of a peal of thunder, as a relief to the heaviness that brooded all around; but none came. The wind stirred now and then into a moan that rattled the stark rushes, and when that died away all was quieter than before. And through all, the darkness, the silence, the lightning that shot athwart both, she ran on and on until the Moss was far behind her,

impelled by the mastering fear of her uncle and his purpose, exaggerating them into murder—fancying she saw the dead face of lovely Mrs. Brunskill “*in such a position that the jaw could not drop;*” influenced by the many influences of her return home to find Tamar gone, of her lonely days and nights with Murdock, of Brunskill’s story and Murdock’s rage, influences far greater than that of the wings that were sustaining themselves above the world and seemed to move with her.

But presently their horror absorbed the others. Instinctively she began to race those wings, from which there seemed no escape. She had not been out an hour, but surely days had lapsed for ever into one long darkness. As this feeling forced itself upon her, she stopped and clasped her head in her hands. Could any one have seen her, they would have known she was losing her senses. She felt herself, dimly, that it was so. The

wings seemed to be descending, to be pressing on her, and her reason, her powers of resistance, were surely failing. It was as though she must sit down to leave some space around her ; and she sat down with the dumb horror of fear and suspense and bewilderment growing upon her, and creeping into her very brain.

She sat down, and soon she fell asleep.

When she awoke, the dawn was breaking, but there had been a shower, and she was wet through. For all this, however, she cared nothing, since it was no longer dark ; but getting up, looked round. It was some time before she could tell where she was, for she had unwittingly diverged from the road and gone down the fields towards the valley. Her thoughts were astray, and she could not fix them on her position. She looked vaguely round, but somehow her brain did not clear, and she could not think. She felt dizzy and exhausted, and knew not what to

do, or whether to do anything but simply to sit down again.

Beyond the shoulder of Blaesfield there came just then a shimmer of light. It spread behind the ridges of the eastern hills, and, gradually creeping into the valley, tinged the mists of morning with a saffron tint—a tint so dim, so impalpable, so subtle in its mere suspicion of colour, that it was surely the shadow of colour rather than itself. There was no glow in it, no obtrusive confidence, such as the setting sun flings abroad. This was a blush, nothing more ; and as it stole up from the underworld it seemed that its light was just as much as a star would diffuse, in the rolling voids of space around it.

How could Molly look and not be bewitched ? She was a dale's girl, and yet had never seen a summer sunrise. She was a dale's girl, and as such had the ardent love of Nature's infinite canvas which only familiarity with and reverence for Nature can

inculcate. She stood and gazed upon it, fascinated, enthralled. Was this how the great burning sun encroached upon the realms of night? this, its wooing of dewy country and empty streets? As it spread softly and slowly over the upper world, she began to walk, and walked instinctively towards it.

Down the dew-laden fields she went, her eyes fixed on that calm herald of the day. It gave her peace and forgetfulness—what more did she want? She went through the farm-yards at Limley, where a dog barked at her, as well it might at a girl walking abroad thus early, hoodless, with clothes that clung, limp and heavy with rain, to her figure. It did not disturb her, however, and she crossed the stream, passed Goyden Pot and Beggar-mote Scar, and turned with the turning of the valley. The golden shimmer had spread faintly all up to Whernside, and stretched before her, alluring in its delicate vagueness ;

but she was beginning to be conscious of great weariness and stiffness, her head throbbed, and every step was a difficulty, sending, as it did, shooting pains through all her limbs.

There is a meadow just before the Alderdale pastures, that is bordered on one side by the river, on the other by a belting of trees. It looked very solemn and quiet now when Molly reached it, and she felt suddenly powerless to go further. There was a strange dizziness in her head; everything seemed to be spinning round, trees, river, grass, hills, and sky, all running chaotically into each other and blotting each other out. She sat down on a stone where the water touched her feet, and laving it out in one palm, bathed her hot head and smoothed her hair, that was hanging down her back in soft dripping lengths; and presently she began to plait it with weak, uncertain fingers. But they were not equal to the task, and

dropped to her side ; and she involuntarily leant back and laid her aching head upon the bank.

This was how Brunskill found her. All night long he had been searching. Tamar and Carling had made their way to Moorhead, and he, sitting up ostensibly reading, but really the victim of a presentiment of some impending calamity, which made study and sleep equally impossible, had been the first to hear them at Mrs. Ormrod's at the other end of the village. Full of sickening fear, he rushed out and devoted himself to the search. Twice already he had passed through this field, and now at the third time his eye was instantly caught by that white heap against the river, that might have been a snowdrift for motionlessness. Another moment, and he was kneeling over it and calling her by her name in a voice that changed from tender pity to sharp agony of apprehension, when she did not answer.

He lifted her, and the movement seemed to rouse her. She opened her eyes, fixing them on him, but he saw that they were vacant in their pathetic, feverish brilliancy, and did not know him. His arms closed round her with convulsive passion of possession as he gazed down at her, uttering every endearing epithet of which he could think.

“ And he knelt over her, and she writhed, and at last she was still.”

Those were the words that presently oozed from Molly's lips, and she screamed in frantic fear, and struggled in his arms.

It froze his blood to hear her. Those were his words of the previous afternoon—not twelve hours ago—*his words!*

Had *they* maddened her?

“ The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children.” Was that true after all? Was this the real visitation, in which there could be no softening? Had his anguish to

fall through her suffering, her suffering to fall through his? Brunskill groaned. Of all thoughts now, this was the most terrible to him.





CHAPTER XIV

PAST VERSUS PRESENT.

“WHAT had you been saying to her? She’s constantly talking of you in her delirium, associating you with murder and suicide and all kinds of horrors. She scarcely names Murdock. She seems to imagine Noll is kneeling over her, and strangling her, or something, and then she says, ‘Oh, don’t, don’t, Mr. Brunskill!’ just as though *you* were hurting her. Had you been discussing such things?”

It was Miss Gliddon who spoke. She had just returned from Alderdale, from watching with Tamar in Molly’s room, and hearing all the wild, hideous images which her

distraught brain was dwelling upon as realities. They had been unable to make any sense out of them. Murdock and his whip and her flight, seemed to be wholly absorbed in some previous horror, of which they knew nothing. There were strange allusions to Tamar's absence, to Matthew's watchfulness, to the quiet house, the long nights with their ghostly moonshine, the eerie sobbing of the river, the reckless scouring up and down of rats behind the wainscot; but although it was evident all these had left their impression upon her imagination, they were wholly subsidiary to some horrible crime with which Brunskill's name was constantly associated. It had made them shudder to hear her.

And then Brunskill met her on the way home.

"How is she?" he looked, rather than asked, his face haggard, his eyes suspicious and imploring and hungry.

“She is very ill, and will be worse yet,” Miss Gliddon said, bluntly, and she stood still and stared at him. “What in the world have you been telling her?” she asked.

He did not answer. His eyes fell.

They walked on, he sunk in miserable thought, she confused, astonished, inclined to be angry and blame him for she knew not what.

Suddenly an idea struck her, flashed across her face like an illumination, but the nature of it made her shrink from giving it utterance. Instinctively she edged away from him and cast a furtive glance of penetrating scrutiny over his whole person and bearing.

He was quick to feel it. Always keenly sensitive, the present over-wrought state of his feelings roused him at once to notice this slight, involuntary action of withdrawal, this drawing away of the skirts of her garments, this broadening of her Phylacteries and

shrinking from the contamination of moral leprosy.

“Don’t!” he said.

It was a little word, but the movement of his hand accompanying it, the low tone of poignant suffering, carried shame and confusion to her soul. She rallied her strict sense of justice, her sound unprejudiced judgment, and renounced the Pharisaical condemnation into which she was drifting.

“I know what you were thinking,” Brunskill said.

“What? But stop—don’t, if you would rather not.”

“I would rather. There is no fear of my being tempted to perjure myself. You were thinking that once upon a time I had committed a crime—let us say, murder—and that I had confessed it to her under promise of secrecy and because I could not now marry her. I wanted her pity for my remorse, I suppose; her belief in my penitence. No!

I have been selfish, but not so selfish as that."

She was silent, self-convicted of her quick falling away from the straight path of charity which does not "cast all doubt upon the darker side;" and he mistook the spirit of her silence.

"You think only guilt could be thus penetrating of suspicion?" he asked, with dulled sarcasm.

"Quite the reverse," she said. "I was thinking only a clear conscience could be thus frank in facing suspicion."

"I could swear to the perfect truth of my refutation," he said.

"I don't want you to swear. I believe you," she assured him, earnestly.

"You thought you had scented the fox?" he asked, with a faint smile.

"I remembered that you were considered to be a Bohemian, that so far as anything was known of you, you might be 'Nobody's

child'; and because this generated a mystery, of course I concluded the mystery must be dark, and you dark too. But that is human nature, to credit a man with sin before goodness. You must forgive me. I had forgotten that the Ethiopian cannot change his skin; and more shame to me after the experience of all these years."

"I would never have touched her hand had mine been wicked. I could never have looked into her eyes, no, not even to learn purity and goodness! But your suspicion was natural enough after what she must have said."

"And there were grounds for her saying it——"

"Many topics come under discussion in conversation."

"Certainly, but some are much better left alone, as in this case. Something has certainly predisposed her to lose her wits under Murdock's brutality. Betty Carling says she

was much frightened on coming home and finding Tamar away. I know she had a great horror of drunkenness."

"That was what we had been talking about. Only yesterday I met her in the fields, and we sauntered and talked."

"And you were telling her of cases that had come under your observation?"

"Of one. She was fascinated; but I did not know, I had no idea, that she had that horror of drunkenness. She said nothing. Of course I might have known that it was no subject for her ears; but I was selfish, blindly selfish!"

"For the first time in your life, then," Miss Gliddon said, warmly. "There, don't reproach yourself, or we shall have you ill next. What a look you look! Have you had any breakfast? No! and you were up all night. Come with me home, and you shall eat properly. You must eat! I know you're sick at heart, you poor fellow, but all the

more reason you shouldn't be sick in body. Yes, yes, I have sense on my side, have I not?"

He could not help smiling. She was so peremptory, so authoritative, as though he were a child; and unused as he was to this true womanly instinct of caretaking and temporal supervision, the mingling of amusement, astonishment, and gratitude that it awoke in him, was the very best tonic that could have been administered.

It was true that long days and nights of suffering and delirium were before Molly, but they could assure him that her brain was only affected by the fever; when that subsided, it would be clear and strong as of old. Every morning found him at Alderdale. The climax things had reached was too great to allow of his being held back from showing his interest in her by any speculation as to what Murdock and the gossips would say. It was he who had found her, and carried her

home and put her under Tamar's care, and then saddled the horse and galloped all the way to Newbridge for the doctor. Thus he had established, by active service, his right to the first daily bulletin. The doctor came in the afternoons, and Brunskill waylaid him as he passed through the village on his homeward way, and insisted on having the truth, and neither more nor less. Then he sat down and penned the report to Ormrod. He had been the first to write to Ormrod. No one else seemed to think of him. Tamar could not write, not being "*scholard*" enough to know her letters, letting alone form them; Miss Gliddon was still preoccupied with her brother; Mrs. Ormrod had gone weeping to Alderdale, and been chiefly useful in entertaining the gossips, scolding Matthew, and soliloquizing at Molly's bedside with arms akimbo; and thus the task seemed to Brunskill to devolve upon himself alone, and he undertook it as a matter-of-course.

He heard in return now and then. Ormrod wrote at first to express his sorrow, to ask for full particulars, to hope she would soon be convalescent—a thoroughly proper letter, whose conventionality a woman would have fathomed quicker than a man. Brunskill never felt its heartlessness. He judged him by himself, chided himself for the chary details he had given, and at once set to work to atone for the fault, producing as the result such a letter as John Alden might have produced had he written instead of spoken to Priscilla. Wholly in innocence of the eloquence which his heart gave to his hand, he continued to write in this simple yet fervid style, which did not fail to impress even Ormrod. Such a fact as that of Ormrod having already swerved from his first love, never entered his mind.

Miss Gliddon came into the school-room one morning with an open letter in her hand.

“Who do you think is coming?” she asked.

“Ormrod, of course,” he said, a dull flush mounting into his cheeks, at the instantaneous thought that he would see Molly, that he had the right to see her.

“Oh, no,” Miss Gliddon said, with an impatient shrug, “I should think, if the truth were known, he’s thankful to be away, and relieved from the necessity of showing active interest, which often entails trouble, you see. No, it is not Noll—a far greater stranger than he, is coming. It is Miss Laybourne—Juliet.”

“Miss Laybourne — what is bringing her?”

“I know as little as you. It is two years since I last asked her, and she has just now noticed the invitation. I suppose she was tired of saying ‘No,’ and so waited until she could say ‘Yes.’ It is one of her usual clever, graceful letters, and she seems to have

overcome all her reluctance, and really to be looking forward to it."

"It will be very nice to see her."

"Very, and I shall want your help in entertaining her. Jules is far from strong yet, and a little fresh company will do you good. The Feast is coming on, you know, and the children will have a week's holiday, and you shall come up to the Vicarage."

"That was a capital idea of mine, quite a happy thought," she reflected, as she went along up the village. "I declare, the prospect of having Juliet, really in the flesh, at last, was too much for my nerves. I expect she's very blue, quite beyond me and my rusty powers, and she'll want to talk, to hold forth, perhaps ; for she's sure to have opinions and fads, and to lose no opportunity for benefiting mankind with them. Now, I could not tolerate that kind of thing. Her letters are all very well, just sufficient aroma of art and fashion to make them piquant and

interesting to an old maid, whose light burns faintly, but appropriately, in an out-of-the-world valley, set round with hills, one of which accommodates a churchyard for her final *Hic jacet* ; but then, letters are different, the fumes of the meal—not the meal itself, and just tickle your senses into speculating on the nature of the solids and liquids, and sweets and bitters, that will be served up presently. And I haven't time any more than inclination, to sit still and knit, and say, *Yes* and *No*, *Indeed* and *Really*, to subjects of which I know little, and for which I care less ; or to go out walking, and be philosophized, or geologized, or botanized with, in the craze girls have now for mastering every branch of knowledge, and only completing their educations on their death-beds, when necessity compels them at last to close their observing eyes, and hermetically seal their inquiring minds. No ! if she did that to me, I would humour her so far as to declare I was a

devoted crustacean, and I would prove my words. I must have my own say. It's impossible to be silent because another woman thinks she has something to say that's better worth listening to, for, of course, she hasn't, or one thinks she hasn't. Now, Brunskill and she will do admirably. He'll listen to her, because she's a woman; and she'll listen to him, because he's a man. I do wonder she's never thought of marrying, but she may have for what I know. I daresay I shall hear everything; she was always a good girl to me, was Juliet, and it wasn't all on account of my empty bloater-pots and ginger-jars. I declare I'm longing to see her now, and I quite dreaded it before, and Brunskill would never guess the invitation was selfish, or an impulse. I wonder what she'll be like."

She had not to wonder long. Juliet followed very close upon her letter, arriving one night at sunset, when there was just sufficient touch of frost in the air to make a fire

acceptable, and to give a never-to-be-forgotten glow of warmth and welcome to the curtained windows, the velvet-covered chairs and sofa, the snowy-draped round table, where the softly-shaded lamplight sparkled upon faultless silver, and crystal, and china, and the fur-rug, where a glossy little terrier lay extended in roasting slumber. They had not expected her quite so soon, and Miss Gliddon was upstairs, so Juliet walked in alone. She had walked up the glebe for old-time's sake. The glebe with the dark outline of the house against the sky, the hills gently folded, the murmur of the stream along the valley, all were familiar. But not so the garden, which she could distinguish as tasteful and tidy ; and far less this cosy luxurious room. She stood just within the door, looking at it ; even the kettle on the hob hissed, as though exulting at the change, its steam curling saucily into the flash of the coal among the péat and wood. She

saw the peat in a moment. How many a sledge had she helped to fill from the gaunt array of stacks on the moors ; how many a skirt-full had she brought in from the lean-to in the yard ! No one in the house could stack them so economically, and yet effectively in the grates, as she ; and they—*Ted*—had dubbed her *Stoker*.

That was years ago ! She stood now—a handsome girl, handsomely dressed, the gleam of a white fur-lined cloak on her arm, her throat clasped round with silver, a flash of jewels on her fingers as she drew off her gloves. Miss Gliddon came downstairs with little ejaculations of surprise and welcome, fired off like rockets, and ran in pushing a last hair-pin through her cap.

“ Oh ! my dear,” she said, “ to think I was not ready—to think——”

But that second reflection, which might have been only number two in a round dozen, was for ever lost ; for Juliet had turned sud-

denly, and thrown her arms round her neck, and laid her head upon her breast, bending in her height, and claiming a sympathy such as a child would have claimed ; gathering it to herself as a child would have done. She did not speak, but maintained that silent clasp until the sob that had gathered in her throat was gone, unsobbed out ; and no trace of emotion remained, unless it were that repressed tears gave that wonderful limpid brilliancy to her eyes, when at last she faced the light.

Miss Gliddon withdrew a few paces and surveyed her.

“What do you think of me ?” Juliet asked, smiling.

“Oh ! it is all stale news to you,” Miss Gliddon said, shrugging her shoulders ; “you know it—‘divinely tall, and most divinely fair ;’ only you are dark. Where did you get that warm olive skin ? It is Spanish. You should wear a lace mantilla, and be a *donna*. You are beautiful, Juliet.”

“Am I?” said Juliet. “And yet, what does it matter?” she added. “I remember I used to think it must surely be better to be beautiful than ugly; that it would give me more chances in life. But one’s ideas change.”

“I won’t allow you to be cynical,” said Miss Gliddon, briskly preceding her upstairs; “you will be quite out of character with the country, if you are; and I won’t have the people’s morals corrupted. Here, if we are unlucky, we *grin and bear it*, as the saying goes; we don’t turn and kick.”

“And you think that is what cynicism does?”

“No; I know that is what cynicism is—the last, low, cowardly growl of the storm. Besides, fancy being cynical with that voice! My dear, your voice is delicious, low-pitched, melodious—made for faith, hope, love. It wants a didactic voice to be effectively and consistently cynical, therefore you are entirely unfitted for it; so remember!”

“ I had no idea you were so clever,” said Juliet.

This was as a battle-cry to Miss Gliddon.

“ My dear,” she said, in sincere expostulation, “ I am not clever. That is exactly what I am not. Don’t harbour such an idea for a moment. I am simply a devoted——”

In her alarm, she was on the point of expending her artillery at once, which would have been awkward, since she had no present intention of proving her words—Juliet’s manner so far having disarmed her ; but she was interrupted by the Vicar calling her, and setting down the candlestick, disappeared without more ado.

“ Yes,” thought Juliet, under the impression that she was completing the sentence as it was meant to be completed, “ she is simply a devoted woman. There is no doubt about it, so she was as honest over herself as over me ; and she is devoted, too, in a good cause,

which is not what all women are. I wonder if I am."

They had a delightful evening. The Vicar deserted his study and joined them, and was for once roused from his abstraction sufficiently to fence with Juliet and enjoy her vigorous talk on modern men and things; and Miss Gliddon found herself content to sit and listen, knitting, and admiring everything about her visitor, from her clear, low voice and her face, which was so animated in spite of its unfrequent smile, to the turn of her head, the easy unselfconscious grace of her finely-developed figure, and the little fascinating tricks of action in her hands.

"Ah! she is delightful," she said to Brunskill, the next day, when he came up and found her busy in the garden. "She is writing some letters just now, but will be out very soon. You will be amazed with her. The wonder is she was not married long ago; but it must be her own fault. Doctor

Thoms has often told us, you know, what she was, but we never imagined her so fine-looking, and her manner so winning. I declare I am not in the least frightened of her."

"Frightened of whom?" asked a voice behind them; and they both turned, and Brunskill held out his hand, a flash of delighted surprise and fun lighting up his face.

"You were the ogress," he said.

"I?"

Juliet smiled; but there was an air of perplexity about her as she stood and looked at him, still holding his hand, and apparently working out some mental puzzle difficult to grasp.

"Have I never seen you since we left?" she asked. "I don't mean spoken to you, Mr. Brunskill, for, of course, I know we have never met point-blank, but in travelling. Surely you have passed me somewhere by road or by rail?"

"Impossible!" said Miss Gliddon. "He

has never been out of the dale since we came, have you?"

"No," said Brunskill.

"I have seen some one very like you then," Juliet said; "but I cannot remember whom. I shall, however," she added, confidently.

He winced, drawing back with a slight smile that revealed rather than concealed some cause of unhappiness, and did not escape her notice.

"You don't look well," she said. "Not that you have aged in the least, but you have an anxious look, which you should not have here, where the air is so pure, and must keep the brain free from cobwebs and the spirits buoyant. What is it?"

"Even here, we live!" he said.

"I understand. Even here, life involves hope and fear, joy and sorrow. 'Each heart its suffering knows.' Yes, that is true, all the world over."

“You look well, in every sense of the word, Miss Laybourne.’

“I am very well,” Juliet said. “But then I may not be, long.”

“Now there is the cloven hoof again,” Miss Gliddon exclaimed. “How dare you be so morbid, Juliet? Brunskill, you must rout it out of her. Of course, there are suffering, and sin, and disease in this life; but we must not anticipate either one or the other. We must rise above them. I wouldn’t give a fig for the man or woman who would shirk discipline. It’s the greatest compliment the Almighty can pay us, to lay burdens upon our shoulders. It shows that we are made of stout stuff, and equal to the wear and tear of Time. Then comes Eternity, and our wounds are healed, our rents patched up, nothing but scars left — and those scars are honourable. ‘Friend, go up higher!’ that will be their meaning, and suddenly we shall see face to face, no longer

through a glass darkly. Everything will be clear ; above all, the sense in the wounds and rents."

"Very true," Brunskill said, softly.

"I don't see it," said Juliet to him. She had listened impatiently, her face darkening and frowning, and, now that Miss Gliddon had left them, plunging in among the musk and sweetbriar bushes to tie up some tall sheaves of phloxes, she walked on with him, eager for argument. "How can *she* tell?" she asked.

"You mean that you think there can be no experience to glean here in this monotonous existence—just large enough for 'the daily round, the common task'?" Brunskill said.

"Yes, of course."

"She has not lived here all her life," he said, gently. "And, besides, don't you think the lives of all old maids enfold some story—some idyll of love? We are made

for love ; it is natural that like should rush to like, that we should expect to meet some one who shall be even dearer to us than ourselves. But there are slips and misses, mistakes and misunderstandings, with fatal consequences ; and then, Ginevra-like, we slip into a chest to hide, and the lid falls, the spring clasps—something has gone out of us that never more sees light of day, and henceforth what is left lives to be practical. The glamour is gone, there is no beacon-light on the future, we live in the present, do our little best, and presently lie down and die. No ties of husband, or wife, or children, bind us to earth. On the contrary, we have long felt that—

“ ‘ Death is Life’s best,
And he wins most who earliest goes to rest.’ ”

“ It is wonderful,” Juliet said, meditatively.

“ Not at all ; it is very simple—the simplest of all the woofs that God weaves.

‘You want that, but you must not have it, it is not good for you,’ is what He says. You have only to bend your will to His—and what easier? Don’t you know the fable of the wise man to his child? ‘Take two pieces of wood, and lay one athwart the other, and you have a cross at once; but lay them by one another—God’s will by your’s—and there is no cross.’ ”

“I did not mean that at all by saying it was wonderful,” said Juliet. “I was thinking of the strangeness of you and Miss Gliddon having reached such conclusions, not because they are religious, but because they must arise from experience. Have you talked much together, and convinced each other from theory?”

“We have never broached the subject. I was surprised by the warmth with which she spoke. It seemed to lay bare so much. Perhaps the sight of you—young, handsome, glowing—reminded her of her own

girlhood, and some wound now only a scar."

"Do you think she has been happy here?"

"Very happy. She is universally liked, and thus her womanhood must be so far satisfied."

"I wonder if it were a great renunciation to leave Marshlands?"

"What events have happened to her, assuredly would happen there. It might be a pain, it might be a relief, to leave them. Memory is less poignant, more consoling, when away from the objects associated with certain incidents. It is easier to believe then that 'duties are ours, and events God's,' because we attach more importance to the duties—at least, I think so."

"It seems to me that you have thought a great deal," Juliet said, with one of her rare smiles, "and I, in my conceit, expected to find no germ of thought among you all. I must have been terribly conceited indeed,

when I was dissatisfied with this place years ago, thinking myself too good for it. Mr. Brunskill, is that old felt wideawake still in existence? How I used to long to know where you had bought it?"

"I bought this at Newbridge," Brunskill said, taking off and smoothing the one he was wearing. "Its predecessor mounted in smoke to heaven long ago."

"It deserved a chariot of fire for the speculation I used to indulge in over it, the interest it gave me, the castles in the air I used to build, of mysteries and intrigues and disguises. And yet I daresay you would have told me at once where it was bought, had I asked you."

"I will tell you now, if you care?" he said.

"Oh, very much," she exclaimed, eagerly.

"It was bought at Carlisle."

Her face fell, as he expected it would.

"That tells me nothing," she said.

“Not even the tradesman’s name, you see,” he remarked.

“Of course I might have known you would not have told me had there been any clue.”

“Clue to what?”

“To where you came from, to——”

“I came from Carlisle.”

“But I have never been to Carlisle.”

“What has that to do with it?”

“I am certain I have seen you somewhere else than here. Are you sure you have never been to Marshlands, or Coombe, or London? Why have you never been to Marshlands? My father has asked you there again and again, I know. It would have been so natural that you should have gone to visit them.”

“I have been as reluctant to go as you to come here, I suppose,” Brunskill said, unable any longer to resist laughing, “but I have been more punctilious than you, Miss

Laybourne; I have always written to decline my invitations if I could not accept them."

"Ah! Miss Gliddon has been telling tales!" Juliet exclaimed, "then I was right—you have mutual confidences. I declare you are as great a tease as ever you were, and it suits you. You don't look half so anxious as you did an hour ago. Is it not strange that I, jaded and blasée and washed-out, after the London season, should come down here and bring you some of the *Elixir vitæ*?"

"You flatter yourself it is *Elixir vitæ*; it may be opium, and——"

"Oh no, it is not. You would not confess to it if it were, because you wouldn't be able to resist taking it, even though you knew it to be noxious."

"And you are neither jaded, blasée, nor washed out."

"What am I then?" she asked, flashing

round upon him and standing still, drawn to her full height.

“Brilliant, handsome,” he said; “my prophecy has come true.”

“Is that the chief merit of the fact, in proving your wisdom?”

“It is not the least, in my opinion.”

“How have you borne to live here all these years? Have you never longed to travel, to go into society, to mingle with men of learning and wit? It is the most preposterous thing I ever knew that a man like you should be content to teach village children,” Juliet said.

“I am content,” he said, simply.

“Aren’t they all blockheads?” she asked, stopping to smell a rose that was struggling out from some stifling clematis.

“By no means,” he said; “indeed you must know it. You have heard of young Ormrod, from the Quins, if you have not

met him. He is an exception, one among others, I assure you."

"Oh! I have met him," she said, and walked on, leaving her blush among the flowers. "But do you really think he is clever?"

"I believe Mr. Quin thinks so, which is more to the purpose."

"But don't you consider it a mistake for him to adopt him? It seems such an anomaly, a carpenter's son received into the family of an R.A. I should think he will certainly disgrace his new position. He may find the restrictions irksome, and make low friends of his own. Was he disposed at all to low company?"

Brunskill laughed.

"He is far too eager for self-advancement to do anything compromising," he said, "besides which he had no low tastes, he was always above his position here, and I can imagine him revelling in what you call *the*

restrictions. He had the love of a child or a Disraeli for the more glittering side of life, would have chosen peacocks rather than flowers in his garden, if he could not have had both."

"That is no fault."

"Oh no, quite the reverse in his case. Artistic perception compels a taste for the beautiful and magnificent, I suppose."

"And you really think him suited for his position?"

"He will probably be famous one of these days, and will deserve his fame, for he will work hard."

"You give him a good character," Juliet said.

Brunskill stopped, looking thoughtfully down the valley.

"On the contrary," he said, carefully clearing his boots from dust on the grassy edge of the sunk fence, "I give him no character. Character is a question of morals, and still

more of principles. As yet they are only sprouting. The test of the crop is in the threshing out."

"Certainly," said Juliet, and could say no more. She felt as though a cold douche had been turned full upon her.

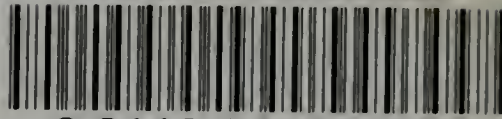
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